

喬林 知

Tomo Takabayashi Presents

いつがZのマ タ暮れに!



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いつかマックス で暮れに!

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Kyou Kara Maou - Volume 06

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Novel Illustrations

Prologue & Chapter 1 by kannnichtfranz

Yay! It's time to start posting another KKM novel! :)

Kyou Kara Maou

Japanese Novel 6 / German Novel 7: *Of Brothers and Sheep*

Translated from the German edition by kannnichtfranz

Beta: Anonyskrit

KKM Fan Translation Reference: <http://clavelsangrante.livejournal.com/1115.html>

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Back Cover Teaser

In his normal life, Yuri Shibuya is a student in the prime of his teenage years -- but what is normal, really? He's gotten himself captured again. On their way through the human-ruled, warmongering empire of Simaron, the beautiful princess Flynn Gilbit is keeping a watchful eye on the Demon King. That, of course, is another of Yuri's roles. He must travel incognito on this trip, but instead of beautiful demons like Lord Weller and Co., only his old schoolmate Murata is by his side. Against expectations, he's proving himself not completely inept!



PROLOGUE

Look at the way I stretch out my right hand. I can tell the position of the sun from the temperature of the evening air.

Do you see? On the tip of my pointer finger, I sense a warm light. Although I'm blind, I can perceive the sunset in these ways.

I can't see, but I'm not sad because of it. After all, it doesn't mean that the world is empty for me. Things also exist outside the world of color -- for example, through sound, warmth, or structure.

When I stand before someone, I can discern their emotional state from their inflection, their breathing, or their voice. So I know what expression is on their face, what they're thinking -- it's as if I were touching this person's heart.

I have never thought of myself as unlucky; blindness is not a heavy burden for me.

There's only one tiny thing I miss. One thing I'd love to observe just once with my own eyes: what might the color of the heavens be? Is it true that it's as delicate as flower petals in the spring? Is the color of the heavens really so similar to the color of my eyes? And does twilight really appear like a ripe fruit falling from the sky?

CHAPTER 1

We rode down a street so broad that all kinds of carriages could speed down it comfortably at high velocities. Thanks to the evenly-laid paving stones, the swaying was held more or less to a minimum. Although the trip had already lasted four days, my backside didn't hurt that badly.

When I looked out the window, I could enjoy the landscape. On the seat across from me sat a beautiful woman with platinum blond hair. Even though we had to spend the nights in the carriage, the trip was by and large quite comfortable -- as long as you didn't consider the fact that I was a prisoner.

Flynn Gilbit feared that her Captain Crusoe -- that's me -- could run away and, to avoid that, she'd posted two musclemen to the left and right of me on the cushion-covered seat. Like a chorus line, these guys had linked arms with me. Observed from a distance, I must have looked like some kind of alien being hauled away by NASA.

I called these two my Beefy Seatbelts. Or better yet my Beefy Booster Seat. Because yes, there was a time when I had to sit on one of these guy's lap.

The Seatbelts didn't deign to look at me at all. Could that be because I hadn't been able to wash for two days?

"They're afraid of you," said Flynn Gilbit with a charming smile. The mask by which she transformed into Prince Norman Gilbit shone silver on her lap. "They're afraid of your black hair and your black eyes, my dear Captain Crusoe," she explained and stretched her hand towards my bangs. It didn't seem like she shared her men's fears.

"Robinson, your assistant, had a black eye too, all of a sudden, but then the next morning it was blue again. His black was surely not real, right? Your eyes possess a completely different luster."

"That's probably because Mu-- err, Robin's eyes shine with more intelligence than mine."

Ken Murata-Robinson sat in the carriage right behind us. I didn't know the reason, but Flynn didn't like it at all when the two of us were together.

"Whatever the case may be, I find your eyes gorgeous. They have the color of a moonless, gloomy night. There are said to be men who would give up all their worldly possessions to own someone like you. Given this color, who would doubt that you could be a wonder drug for immortality and eternal youth."

In my head I saw myself as foodstuffs at the Sichuan Market -- alongside the baby monkeys, fawns, and insect larvae.

"You, of all people, are gushing about *my* looks?" I grumbled. "Are you trying to make me angry? Your own face outclasses everyone."

"Well, aren't you a sweet talker?"

Flynn's delicate fingertips approached the stone on my chest. "I'm not afraid of your eyes, but of this stone." She withdrew before her hand touched the stone of a blue deeper and stronger than the sky itself. "I can't help myself. I can't shake the feeling that tremendous power and dark secrets are hidden inside. For the people of Carolia, it has great meaning simply from the Wincott coat of arms it displays."

"If Adalbert is right, the people here were pretty rotten to the Wincotts back then. So it's no wonder they have a guilty conscience and feel lousy every time they see that coat of arms."

"Captain, please don't misunderstand. The Gilbit family first came into existence long afterwards. We have nothing to do with the rulers of that time."

"But then why are you still so keen on descendants of the Wincotts, after all this time?"

"If I were to reveal all my secrets, would you then support me in my plans? Would you then give up the idea of running away?" She bestowed a graceful smile upon me, as if we were taking afternoon tea. Her platinum blond hair sparkled in the weak light of the stray sunbeams that had pushed their way through the early winter clouds.

In the Demon Empire, spring had just begun and it was the height of the rainy season. Yet in the Simaron region, autumn was already drawing to a close. Maybe we found ourselves at the opposite latitude now? By Earth's standards, that would be the simplest explanation for the difference in the weather.

"Don't you think the sky looks creepy?" I asked.

"Why do you say that? It's just a little cloudy."

"You can probably decide whether it's normal or not better than I can."

Hopefully there's no earthquake or other catastrophe waiting for us."

--

A conversation about the weather was just what we needed; finally we were able to discuss a less tender subject.

At our first meeting, we had both pretended to be mute. When Flynn Gilbit took off her mask and her real countenance was revealed, a gorgeous woman whose words and behavior were full of confidence suddenly stood before me. But she didn't look strong in the literal sense. Her voice was full of sweetness and there was a mischievous shine to her eyes.

Disguised as her husband, Flynn had been ruling the princedom and was overwhelmed with responsibilities. But perhaps her decisive nature made her the perfect person to stand at the top of the state, I thought.

Human beauty looked different from the demonic beauties like Lady Anissina, Madam Cherie, and Gunter. If demons were the results of a brilliant artist, then Flynn seemed more like an actress.

Although this woman had toyed with me unpleasantly, I was able to keep my anger towards her in check. I felt kind of like an athlete obsessed by his sport whose head has been turned by some female journalist or female star.

But Flynn had imprisoned me for three whole days and condemned me to a starvation diet. That was hard. And to cap it off, there were always these fantastic dishes trotted out to me that made my mouth water. I had no choice but to wait it out. It's too bad that an empty stomach can't save the world -- I'd have been a hero several times over.

All this only because of Gunter's warning: *Don't eat any food that a foreigner has offered you -- it might be poisoned!*

At one point I threw the bread and meat out the window and in no time at all, a sharp-eyed bird spotted it and started to pick at it. And then came the showstopper! The bird let out an unusual, tortured cry and flopped over on the windowsill unconscious. Its eyes were half closed and its tiny tongue even jutted out a little from its open beak. What a tragedy! I heaped blame upon myself with countless reproaches.

Please forgive me, little bird. I simply didn't think. I will definitely take good care of all your surviving dependents. You can have all my savings! Wait a second, what was that just now?!

All of a sudden the victim I'd thought dead picked himself up and flew off, livelier than ever.

So the food hadn't been poisoned, it'd just been laced with a sleeping drought. Captain Crusoe needed to be sedated so he didn't make any trouble.

How the heck did it end up like this, anyway?

--

One lovely day, I, Yuri Shibuya, was flushed away down a toilet into another world. There I was informed that, in reality, I was nothing less than the 27th Demon King!

I am equipped with (supposedly) formidable magical powers, and my numerous subjects, who all look scarily gorgeous, love and revere me.

As king, naturally I have all sorts of problems to manage, but the position also has its perks. My sweet little adopted daughter, for example. And everyday life in Blood Pledge Castle is also pretty nice. I almost could have gotten used to that, but then a catastrophe destroyed it all.

The Demon Empire is stuck in the middle of a terrible crisis. A mysterious

attempt was made on my life. Lord von Kleist was knocked from a horse and Lord Weller's left arm was cut off. We were separated and I had no idea what had happened to either one of them. Lady Anissina would definitely see to my schoolmaster. And Conrad... the memory of the explosion and Conrad's apology came back to me again. I balled my hands into fists. I was rock-solid convinced they had both survived!

It was simply impossible that Conrad might not be alive any more. After all, he had promised me that he would always be there for me when I needed him.

My return trip to Earth misfired. I landed in the ocean and washed up on human territory. As I came back to myself, I had to accept that my Japanese friend Murata had also been snatched. It was kind of my fault that he was sitting in the other carriage now.

Flynn Gilbit had swallowed our fairy tale of lies that I was a descendent of the Wincotts. Later she stuck both Murata and me in solitary confinement. My buddy still believes he's on Earth. I have to safeguard him from even worse dangers, because I'm the only one who can protect him.

As the third day of my prison life dawned, my early panic receded. I could take in my surroundings in a more or less composed fashion.

I already had a few ideas for escape plans, but their chances of success were pretty remote. The window was large and I could open it, but there was no veranda or balcony. My room was on the fifth floor. I had already tried to craft myself a makeshift rope, but ripping the bedsheets into straight strips just didn't want to work for me. In the end, I sat before a mountain of crescent shaped shreds. They were shaped like the markings on an Asiatic black bear. For the first time in my life, I regretted that I'd spent all my time with baseball, to the exclusion of all else.

Nearly 58 hours had passed; it was almost noon. Sunlight flooded the room. I opened the window as wide as it would go and shivered. I leaned my body out

the window and stared around. Six, perhaps seven windows down from me, my friend also sat in the window and warbled an opera in happy-go-lucky fashion. Thanks to his radical image change, his head was covered in artificial blond. Despite the blue contact lenses that were supposed to give the necessary emphasis to his new image, the results were unconvincing to me.

"Murata!" I needed to get his attention, so I waved one of the bedsheet shreds around wildly.

"Yoo hoo, Shibuyaaaa!" Murata waved his arms in big circles happily.

Damn it, what was "Yoo hoo" supposed to mean in this situation?!

"Hey, everything okay?" Murata called.

"Okay?! Are you nuts? Look out, I'm coming over to you."

"Ahhh, but..." Murata eyed the wall up and down. After he'd convinced himself it didn't have any protrusions, he continued, "Unless you're Spiderman, that's not going to work. There's nothing for you to hold on to. If something goes wrong, you'll be able to call yourself Splatterman."

"Jeez, now is not the time for stupid jokes! Listen to me!" I climbed up on the bronze windowsill. "We have to get out of here as soon as possible!"

Murata leaned out of his window as far as he could. "Very inconspicuous, with you yelling like that."

"Your friend is right, my dear Captain."

I was grabbed by the belt. Flynn stood right behind the butler. She furrowed her eyebrows theatrically and shrugged her shoulders.

"Why don't you do us all a favor and keep calm? We don't want anything to

happen to you," she said.

"In you go!" grunted the butler and tugged mightily on me, making me land on the floor.

Flynn continued, "I separated you from your friend so I wouldn't need to worry about your magical powers. But not only are you refusing any food, you're also placing yourself in mortal danger in your escape attempts! You won't survive long at this rate." More to herself, she added, "These soldiers, always with their stubborn ideals!"

Huh? What was that? Soldierly ideals? Oh yeah, I was pretending to be a captain. But I still felt offended. To lock up a Japanese pacifist and then also to characterize him as a soldier, how insulting.

Flynn's delicate fingers carefully closed and locked the window with a key.

"Baker, please prepare the carriages. We can't wait any longer for the escort to arrive. For your sake, Captain Crusoe, it's best if we bring you to the motherland as soon as possible. Now that Maxine knows the secret of the mask, troops from Small Simaron could arrive at any moment to occupy Carolia."

"But, Milady, keep in mind..." the butler tried in vain to protest.

"We'll be able to bring a number of soldiers with us, anyway, if we take those stationed here from Simaron. It's only going to be critical in the regions where the Steppe Brotherhood might turn up. It's important that we put those areas behind us as soon as possible. After that, we'll be more or less secure."

So much for the prologue. Now we were traveling in four carriages into the so-called "motherland" -- with me wedged in between my two Beefy Seatbelts.

By contrast -- I'd had to put up with his good mood when we embarked --

Murata's seatbelts were two powerful Amazon women!

Why is it always me?!

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 by kannnichtfranz

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Kyou Kara Maou

Japanese Novel 6 / German Novel 7: *Of Brothers and Sheep*

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CHAPTER 2

When Lord von Voltaire opened the door, bright violet smoke streamed out towards him.

Anissina was busy with several vessels on her work table, her attention concentrated on an unnaturally dense froth. She spared not a single glance towards her childhood playmate.

The only one to lift her head in reaction to Gwendal's presence was the girl taking refuge at the window, leaning against the panes with her arms wrapped around her knees.

"Has Yuri been found?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh..."

She buried her face between her knees again. Even the pigtails bound on either side of her head drooped forlornly. Did she really intend to spend yet another evening in this room?

Lady Anissina von Kavernikov, one of the three great female demons of the Empire, widely known as "The Red Devil," finally noticed Gwendal. She set aside a flask that was threatening to explode.

"How are you progressing?" Gwendal asked.

"That was going to be my question," Anissina replied. "But no, don't say anything, I already know. The wrinkles between your eyebrows reveal everything. We still don't know where His Majesty is, and the reports from the search troops are unsatisfying as well."

"And on top of it all, as if I didn't already have enough trouble, that spoiled princeling... oh, forget it. Have you gotten any further with Lord von Kleist?"

"Well, you can see for yourself how things are with him."

Snow Gunter still lay in his bed of powdery snow and ice. He, along with the snow rabbit between his legs, had grown even paler than before. His color was like that of a corpse.

Meanwhile, the much more compact Madam Butterfly Gunter still had her delicate almond-shaped eyes drawn in narrow slits. Her beautiful black hair gave her a stately look. The doll was enthroned on a stool with a cigarette dangling between her lips. Her eyes stared blankly into the distance.

"He's completely let himself go to pot," Gwendal grumbled.

"You said it, my dear."

"And Greta looks ready to drop."

"Oh... yes," Anissina confirmed casually.

Anything not directly related to her experiments only interested Anissina casually.

Gwendal wished that his youngest brother were there with him. It had already been seven days since Lord Wolfram von Bielefeld had set off of his own volition.

"The girl is probably not getting any sleep because her father is missing," Gwendal observed.

"I have just the thing for such cases right here!"

Anissina spun around; her flaming red hair cut through the air and caught Gwendal by the chin as if she had intentionally aimed for him.

"Hey, watch it!"

"You must take a look at my newest masterpiece. I call it, *Sleep Little Child Sleep.*"

Anissina reached for the bookcase and pulled out a relatively thin volume. On the creepy-looking red and purple cover, the fear-inducing title was written: *The Devil-woman Anissina and her Secret Research Laboratory.*

"D... devil-woman..." Gwendal stuttered.

Then he took in the woman with long red hair who was strangling several men to death on the book's jacket.



The author held her devilry under Gwendal's nose and passionately began her explanation. "The children of today simply don't want to go to sleep. Their mothers have to fight with them nearly every night. I find this situation very regrettable. To help them, I developed my invention, *Sleep Little Child Sleep!*"

"It looks like a regular picture book to me."

"Picture book? I beg of you! How laughable! This book conceals a pure and perfect magical force. And its usage is child's play. Every child who is read aloud to from this book at bedtime will inevitably surrender to sleep within a few pages. I'd stick my hand in fire on that. The child will roll back and forth a bit in torment, lash out at the bed itself, and very quickly admit defeat! And if, against all expectations, it doesn't work, the item can be returned within a period of ten

days."

Gwendal threw a quick glance at the back of the book. The number that was required for published products was missing.

"Oh, yes, the number is missing. Naturally I have been in conversation with the Demonic Central Institute for Literature, but they honestly wanted to publish this wonderful masterwork of children's literature in the horror section. What an absurd thought! I declined on grounds that this book exists for a benevolent purpose and was never intended to earn money. It's really a puzzle to me. What part of it is supposed to be horror?"

"No idea, I haven't read it..." Gwendal grumbled, his tone growing more and more melancholy as the conversation progressed.

"Then now's the time, my dear. You can read it to Greta and you'll see, she'll be asleep before you know it. Your deep bass is ideal for terrorizing small children."

Lord Gwendal von Voltaire flipped to the first sentence of the book: *Someone had vandalized the grave.* Well, that was a good beginning.

--

At 82 years old, Lord Wolfram von Bielefeld stood in the full bloom of his youth. Full of pride, he looked back at the great accomplishments he'd made in the last year. He'd gotten engaged and he'd even adopted a daughter. But there was still one thing that did him in.

"Ugh! Urrrrrrrgh... bu... buaarrggh!"

He still got slightly seasick.

Gisela, a first-class healer, rubbed his back. "Your Excellency has really made great progress over the years. Even the way you vomit nowadays would make

any man proud."

Comforting words were not exactly her strong suit, but the movements of her hands were full of compassion.

"Nowadays? Urgh... I could always... urgh... vomit like a respectable man."

Two of Gisela's four companions had already disappeared into their cabins. Only the bald, middle aged soldier and his colleague with the aloof face and cold eyes observed the scene from a safe distance.

"Your Excellencyyyyy!" called the one with the bald head. "Dinner's about to be served!"

"Please don't talk about food -- urgghh!"

Their hasty departure hadn't left Wolfram the opportunity to be choosy about the method of transportation -- after all, the king's life was at stake. The floating death trap they'd boarded was a glorified freight ship and couldn't have been further from a luxury liner for pleasure travel. Despite that, the passengers jammed into the tight quarters without complaint.

Twice a day meals were served, for which one had to remain standing, armed with a soup spoon. There was cause to rejoice when dried meat was served -- usually the passengers had to make do with dry bread.

Up to this point, Wolfram had led a protected and spoiled life, in which he'd only laid worth on outer appearances. For him a boat trip meant a vibrant dinner party. By day, one spent one's time hunting giant fish with harpoons or docked at a harbor city for a delightful day trip. That exhausted the list of things Wolfram associated with sea travel.

"Would you like to lie down and rest in the cabin for a while?" Gisela asked.

"Not really... I don't think I'd feel any better if I were squeezed into one of those bunk beds. How do you stand those damn cabins? Any jail cell would be more comfortable..."

"Please hold on just a little longer, Your Excellency. You are simply not used to it; for us, it's the standard way to travel." Gisela clapped Wolfram on the back as if she were rebuking a younger brother.

Although her voice didn't sound accusative, Wolfram felt ashamed of his words. "Sorry," he murmured and looked out across the sea.

"Oh, don't be. Of course you are disturbed, Your Excellency. You've never had anything to do with the simple folk before."

"Just the opposite of him."

"You mean His Majesty?"

Gisela's skin, pale as was typical of the healer race, gained a little color. Her calm, dark green eyes, full of prudence, crinkled with her smile. "He's something special, isn't he?" she said.

"So you see it that way, too?"

"Yes. And it's not just me, everyone thinks so. Nobody can hold a candle to His Majesty. He's different, yet at the same time he's just like all of us. He stands with us at the same level. Although we soldiers and the commoners are his subjects, he treats us as if we were equals. He never points out his high birth or his rank, but he also doesn't let anyone intimidate him. His Majesty is a real puzzle."

"A puzzle! You said it! And an odd duck on top of it."

"Your Excellency, please."

Wolfram felt a breeze at his side. When he turned to Gisela, she had stretched her right hand out towards the sinking evening sun. From her fingertips to her elbows to her cheeks, she was doused in scarlet red light.

"He reminds me of the late Lady von Wincott..."

"Susanna Julia?"

"Yes. Lady Susanna Julia also treated me like an old friend from the very beginning. She took hold of my bloody, dirty hands, and said that they would feel good... don't you also think the two are similar?"

Wolfram was completely unprepared for that question. For a moment he even forgot his nausea. "She and Yuri? No idea. I never had much contact with the Wincotts. You'd have to ask Conrad."

"That's true... I'm probably imagining things. After all, His Majesty is not blind and is healthy as can be. Maybe he only reminds me of her because the demon stone looks so good on him."

"On this topic, there's something I've always wanted to ask you..."

Lord von Bielefeld hesitated. Should he really ask this question? But in the end, his curiosity triumphed.

"How exactly did Susanna Julia die? Of course, I heard there was something going on with Conrad, and that she threw herself into the battle, even though she was only a member of the reserves. I also know where she fell and how many cities were saved because of her... but what exactly was the cause of death? People say there was an accident during the return home. There was an explosion and she accidentally got caught in it. But nobody saw her body. Do you know what really happened? I mean, is she really dead?"

"Why are you asking me these questions?"

"I have a funny feeling... maybe the woman's voice Yuri hears in his head belongs to Julia? If Julia the White is still alive and is helping that wimp with his magic... I'm afraid that one day, she'll take Yuri away to wherever she is now..."

The soldier with the cold look walked slowly to the interior of the ship. He didn't let his unusually long and thick quiver out of his sight for a single moment, even though the arrows themselves were in his bunk. He was an odd old codger. As Wolfram waited for Gisela's answer, he had to laugh quietly to himself at the unusual habits of that man.

"Lady Susanna Julia von Wincott is dead, without doubt," Gisela said.

As Wolfram processed that answer, his tension was suddenly gone as if it had blown away. Now he regretted his absurd question. Should he apologize to Gisela?

But the young woman continued, and her face showed no sign of pain or sadness.

"There was no accident. The exact circumstances were never made publicly known. Precisely speaking, it can't be called a death on the battlefield. She wasn't injured by sword or arrow. In fact, her body showed no outer sign of fatal injury at all."

"But then why wasn't her body interred? You can't mean to tell me that soldiers of the Demon Empire would leave the body of their fallen comrade behind?"

"No. I burned Julia's corpse myself."

Horrified, Wolfram's fingers clawed at the railing. For a moment he didn't trust his ears.

"I was her assistant. The burning was an order -- cremation was unavoidable. Surely you are aware that the bodies of the Wincotts cannot be allowed to remain behind. A rare poison can be made from their blood."

"And that's why Julia's body was burned?"

"It was her wish." Gisela closed her eyes briefly and her head sank. Then she raised it slowly and continued, "Only a few people know about this, but surely you have the right to the knowledge. She went to her death of her own free will... please excuse my clumsy phrasing... how should I express it? She knew exactly what fate awaited her. She knew what would happen to her if she applied powerful magic on human territory. Her body and soul were abused and exhausted. The magic she used surpassed her powers. She knew that, yet she did what she had to do. She had to stop the enemy army in order to save numerous towns and villages. Without hesitation, she gave her life for that. And before she died, I made her a promise."

The setting sun was mirrored in Gisela's tranquil green eyes.

"I promised her to never allow someone else to experience the same fate."

All at once, Gisela turned to face Wolfram again. She allowed herself no time to wallow in her memories, and showed her kind smile -- the one she used to convey comfort to the sick and wounded.

"Lord von Bielefeld! Together we'll find His Majesty and bring him back!"

The ship began to rock heavily and the waves beat fiercely at the side of the ship. To the south, far in the distance, land was in sight. Once before, Wolfram had traveled to shore in a lifeboat from this distance. Yuri had taught him a chant of encouragement from the other world. He found himself remembering the rhythm and sound of the chant.

"Do you know the rower's chant, Gisela?" he asked his travel companion. "Listen,

it goes like this: *ha ha puuh, ha ha puuh...*"

Gisela looked at him skeptically. "But Your Excellency... that is the breathing technique of a mother giving birth."

"What?!"

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 by kannnichtfranz

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CHAPTER 3

Naturally, I could escape from here at any time. Since my Beefy Seatbelts were men, they both had their weak point. All it would take is two punches to the groin and my arms would be free. Then, a purposeful jump from the moving carriage onto the shoulder! Eight rolls forwards, stick the landing, and collect an uncontested 10.0 from the judges!

Ouch! The thought alone was painful.

But escape wasn't impossible -- if you accepted the risk of whiplash. It probably would feel as if you were thrown to the mat fifty times by a judo fighter. Whether I would survive it wasn't the real problem. My real problem was Murata!

How could I rescue him from the carriage behind us? And if I jumped out onto

the street, wouldn't the next carriage just roll over me, anyway? Damn it, why did I deserve this? I hadn't even committed any crimes!

I had to come up with a plausible reason why the carriage would have to stop. Then I would just have to make it through the door and leg it! A potty break, that was the answer! But how could I get Murata to play along? I gave telepathy a try.

Peeing, now -- Muraken. You need to pee -- Muraken, I pleaded with him in my mind.

The musclemen next to me started to fidget restlessly on their seats. Damn it, not you!

As we left the harvested fields behind, a broad steppe landscape widened before us. The vegetation was so pathetically thin that it barely covered the ground. Winter was on its way.

All of a sudden, Flynn shut the curtains.

"Drive faster!" she commanded in a tense voice and crossed her arms in front of her breasts. Small worry wrinkles appeared on her forehead; she seemed to be brooding intensely on something.

Gwendal also made that kind of face all the time. With a bad conscience, I'd forced all the state matters off on him. No wonder the poor thing was swimming in worries.

Flynn didn't have it much better. She had taken over the role of her dead husband and did everything possible to protect her country. The folded mask on her lap spoke volumes.

One of the musclemen suddenly pricked his ears. The thundering of the horses' hooves had changed their rhythm. Something disturbed the harmony.

"Horsemen!" Everyone abruptly went pale.

"It's the Steppe Brotherhood! Drive faster!" Flynn cried.

"Faster, Milady? That's impossible!"

Flynn's driver hung like a frantic jockey from the coachman's seat. He looked like he was about to bite his tongue off.

"You've got to lose them somehow! They can't find out we're heading west!"

"Why not?" I asked agitatedly. "What happens if they find out!?"

The whole carriage rocked like crazy and we were thoroughly shaken up on the seats.

"Carolia and the Steppe Brotherhood officially belong to Small Simaron," Flynn explained. "If we pay a visit to Big Simaron on our own initiative, our colonial power wouldn't take it lightly."

Once again with this ominous "Brotherhood." Flynn always scrunched up her forehead in disgust when she spoke of it. These strange brothers probably got the same classification as Maxine to her.

We'd recently had to beat up a little on Nigel Weiz Maxine, the guy with the ponytail. I kept involuntarily remembering the cry he let out as he fell from an upper floor. It was hard to believe he could come away from that unscathed.

"They're catching up to us," Flynn noted as she risked a glance behind the carriage.

I turned around too, along with my Seatbelts. They had already caught up to our rear guard; four or five of the riders were about as far back as Murata's carriage.

In spite of our four horsepower, we didn't stand a chance. It was only a matter of time.

"What kind of guys are these, anyway? Like yakuza?" I asked.

"They're Small Simaron's henchmen. Those dishonorable, spineless fools lick the boots of the powerful. If they find out where we're headed, they'll be only too happy to betray us. For praise from the mouth of His All-powerful Highness Saralegi, *the Seer*, they would do anything!" Flynn snarled.

Saralegi -- Maxine had mentioned that name too. That guy was supposed to be the king of Small Simaron or something. Flynn had hatefully called him "The Seer" -- was that some kind of title?

Our carriage suddenly decelerated. Flynn let out a hysterical cry. She'd long lost the control to portray her husband.

"Why are we stopping?! Keep driving! We've got to lose them!"

"Milady, we are stuck in the middle of a herd of sheep."

"A herd of sheep?" Flynn repeated as she stumbled to the small window and looked forwards.

Sheep, sheep, sheep, as far as the eye could see. A giant herd of sheep had brought this express highway for carriages to a complete standstill.

As the wheels creaked and groaned, Flynn lost her composure completely. She repeatedly and pointlessly shoved a cushion from one side of the carriage to the other. "Oh dear, what am I supposed to do now? How do I get out of this? And then those annoying customs on top of it all, shit!" slipped out of Flynn's mouth in an unladylike manner. She was about to have a panic attack.

While Flynn was pulling her hair out, the carriage went slower and slower until it

came to a complete stop in the middle of the herd of sheep. The wandering livestock had us surrounded. Countless wool labels buzzed around in my head: hand wash only!

Parting the cream-colored sea of sheep, two members of the Steppe Brotherhood approached.

"They can't find out that I'm alone," Flynn said.

"What do you mean, alone? We've pretty much got a whole traveling party," I said.

"Oh, yes, you're right about that. It's very comforting not to be alone," Flynn sighed, but right after that she cried, "Oh goodness, no! That only makes everything worse! In Small Simaron, women are forbidden to travel alone, but it's even worse when a woman is with a man who isn't her husband!"

"Flynn, calm down! Things will work themselves out. Take a deep breath!"

My attempt to get her to relax seemed to be working. Flynn regained a little of her composure. She laid her hand on her chest to settle her breathing.

"Many thanks, Captain Crusoe. I'm feeling a little better already. We have to get this situation under control somehow. After all, my task is not yet complete. I must bring you and Mr. Robinson into the motherland of Big Simaron."

The only question left was, as a prisoner, what should I do in this situation? Should I seize the opportunity and make a run for it? Wouldn't we just run right into the arms of the Steppe Brotherhood? And would those gangsters treat us like guests or sink us to the bottom of Tokyo Bay as enemies? For now, I decided to wait.

"I'll speak to the men," Flynn said.

"Stay cool, Boss!" I called to her.

Flynn stepped slowly out of the carriage and walked towards our pursuers.

There were two strongly built men with clipped beards like Maxine's, wearing bright blue riding uniforms.

"Those are afros!" I cried.

It was true! The superb brown hairdos, the same color as their horses, were afros just like in the picture books. I really wanted to take a photo. Real afros! Not those imitation pseudo-hairstyles in Japan.

Flynn seemed to be complaining about something to the men. She raised her voice. "But Father!"

Father?

"Flynn and the afro-man are father and daughter?!"

"Yep," one of my Seatbelts said.

"I've already explained it to you, Father!" Flynn continued. "It's not my intention to travel alone to Big Simaron. Sir Norman is with me. His health is poor, so we want to consult with a good doctor in the motherland."

"If your husband needs a doctor, my child, all you'd have to do is turn to the Brotherhood, or to His Majesty Saralegi. And besides that, my son in law has neglected to pay a visit to the motherland for three years, using his health as the excuse. So my doubts there are more than justified, even you must admit it."

The truth about Norman Gilbit had apparently not made the rounds.

"Father! Are you trying to imply that Norman is not capable of attending to the

duties of governing and leading the people?!"

"But no, my child, I wasn't saying that at all. I'm only saying that if Sir Norman isn't capable of leading the people because of his illness, you can count on us at any time. We're family, after all."

"Carolia is doing fine on its own. Despite his illness and the accident, Sir Norman is absolutely capable of governing our country, I mean, the autonomous region under Small Simaron's sovereignty. Your concern is completely unnecessary, Father!"

"And so why is it that I never get to lay eyes on my son in law?!"

Flynn faltered, her self-confident look seemed unsure for a moment. She knew the answer to that question better than anyone: Norman could no longer be counted among the living. Perhaps she could fool foreigners like Murata and me, but her own father?

"Flynn!" he called suddenly. "Have you forgotten your own background? Although you are Carolian now, you still belong to the Steppe Brotherhood. Don't forget, my child! What was the reason you were married into the Gilbit family?"

"You won't get your wish, Father!" The daughter lifted her head once more. "I know what you and my brother are thinking. I understand what all your plans are in aid of. I won't deliver you Carolia. Even if in the future, Sir Norman's health leaves something to be desired, I won't be turning to you for help!"

Shocked, I pulled myself back from the window. When I moved to sit back down in my original spot, muscleman number 2 tugged me kindly by the elbow, so that I didn't plop down onto his lap.

So what was going on? Flynn Gilbit's father appeared to be the boss of the Steppe Brotherhood. He married his daughter into the Gilbit clan to get control

of Carolia. So Sir Norman was in danger of being thrown from the throne.

And the time was ripe now! The time had come to take Carolia completely under the power of the Steppe Brotherhood! But the plan didn't work, unfortunately for him. The father had miscalculated. His honest, always obedient, young daughter didn't exist any more!

I registered a gleam out of the corner of my eye. On Flynn's seat across from me, the silver mask glinted in the winter sunlight.

"Hey, you musclemen. Could you let go of the seatbelt for a moment?"

My fingers reached for the mask, almost as if it had called out to them.

Wait, slow down! Think this through, Yuri! This woman imprisoned Murata and me, and is trying to drag us to Simaron, which is the enemy of the demons! Besides that, Big Simaron possessed the exact weapons used in the ambush. Again I heard Conrad's voice and my breath got stuck in my throat.

Flynn was in league with those lowlifes. So why should I take Flynn's side in this?

It was all about territorial disputes. As a general rule, family members were often misused in such situations. The afro-man wasn't the only one to ever use such dirty tactics. Why get worked up about it? Why lose my head over it? Stay cool, man. Always keep your cool.

"Damn it! When was I ever cool-headed?!"

I grabbed the silver mask and pulled it over my head. The material felt warm. Perhaps the sunlight falling through the window had warmed it. Or was it, perhaps, the warmth of heart that anyone taking the role of Norman Gilbit was required to possess?

I wore the face of the one whose role Flynn had played for three years.

I gathered all my courage together, stepped out of the carriage, and yelled: "I've had enough already!"

Surprised, the afro-man and his daughter spun around.

Under the mask, my face melted into a broad grin. That was intended to look rakish, but unfortunately only seemed whiny. Whatever -- no one could see it anyway!

"I'm Norman Gilbit! In full possession of my powers and completely capable of leading the country. My heath is once again... urgh!"

As I took a forceful step forwards, I had stupidly forgotten the carriage step. My left foot swished around in the air. I toppled forwards and plonked down in the middle of the dirty white sea of sheep wool.

"Nmo! Nmo! Nmo! Nmo!" roared the sheep in panic.

"F... forgive me, how clumsy of me..." I stammered more to the sheep than in the direction of Flynn and company.

When I straightened myself up again, I was hip-deep in sheep. The sheep of this country were a little bigger than those back on Earth.

"Captain Cru... my dear!" called Flynn, surprised and baffled. She tried to tell me something with gestures -- she touched her chin with her thin fingers and opened and shut her mouth vigorously. Was she afraid I wasn't getting enough air?

I could see better through the mask than I'd anticipated, and my nose and mouth had plenty of room. So breathing didn't cause me much trouble at all.

The afro-man hastened down from his horse and stepped up agitatedly to his

son in law.

"Sir Norman...! You must excuse my impolite remarks. Since I haven't seen you for so long, I was overcome by one or two doubts. If my silly suspicions reached your ears, I can well understand that you would be angry. But be reassured, it's only a small joke between me and my daughter that you will hopefully forgive."

"But no, don't apologise! Who could blame you? After all, it's been three years since we last saw each other. Although, the main reason for that is the fact that my wife doesn't care to visit her parents' house."

I didn't have the foggiest idea how to act. What kind of guy was this Norman Gilbit, anyway? A chummy tone was surely uncalled for, so I decided to go for snooty.

"What were you thinking?" I boasted. "That I wouldn't be a suitable leader? What a brazen insult!"

Flynn, standing behind her father, shook her head vigorously. Apparently I wasn't playing my role up to her expectations.

"Although I am newly risen from my sickbed, I do my best to be a good prince. My steadfastness! For my citizens and country, my life is not too ailing, hohohohoho."

My beautiful platinum-blond wife pointed her finger at my jaw and sighed. To judge by Flynn's unhappy expression, I needed to really put my back into it to hoodwink my father in law.

Imagine it, Yuri -- the life of a masked man! The terrible childhood illness, the marriage to a gorgeous woman born of a clan with eyes on your country. On top of that, your country is overrun by a neighboring superpower and now war stands yet again before the door. Three years ago you had an awful accident where you even lost your ability to speak...

Uh oh!

"My dear Sir Norman, when did you regain the ability to speak?"

Whaaaaaat?!

Shit! I had totally forgotten that Norman couldn't speak normally any more! Geez, how bad can it get? That's what happens when you frantically try to hold on to the life of a dead person!

"Uhhhhh -- my voice -- is -- errrrrrr..."

Suspicion grew in my opponent.

"Is it really you? Are you really and truly Sir Norman, my son in law? Do you swear your love to my daughter?"

"By all the gods -- I love Flynn!"

The Steppe Brotherhood's faces remained hard. My confession of love had apparently lacked conviction.

It suddenly became damp under the mask. Sweat began to run down my neck. I was overtaken by an urgent desire to strike hard with a big weapon, and then to run away as fast as possible. Damn it, where was a weapon when you really needed one?

Then it happened.

"I'm the miracle healer that has brought the voice back to Sir Norman Gilbit!"

Ken Murata stepped out of the carriage behind us.

Theatrically spreading his arms wide, he hopped lightfootedly down the steps -- and landed right in the sheep, just like I did.

He begged their forgiveness and crawled along the ground, looking for something. "My glasses, my glasses..."

"Err, you weren't wearing any."

"I hadn't believed him to be such an oaf. I guess I overestimated your friend," Flynn said with resignation.

"Sir Norman, who is this person?" The afro-man's question was more than warranted. Anyone would find Murata suspicious, flanked by his two Amazonian Seatbelts.

"Th... that is Robinson, my close friend."

"May I introduce myself? Robin is my name! Nice to meet you!" Murata pulled off a sweeping bow, as if he wanted to hand out his business card.



"It's no wonder you're concerned, when you've heard nothing from your daughter's husband for three years. And what a shock it must be for you that he can suddenly speak again! But please don't worry. I, Tokyo Magic Robinson, the miracle healer, have accomplished this. With the power of agaricus, propolis, and the extract of the Chinese Soft Frog, his voice sounds more beautiful than ever before! It's true, right, sweetie pies?"

"Yes, boss!" piped the Amazons.

Murata, I can't believe it! What century do you come from, anyway?! How the devil did you pull off making these Amazon Seatbelts into your assistants?

One of the muscle-packed beauties handed Murata a small bottle.

"Here, this is it. This miracle cure heals the common cold and even encourages hair growth. Its effect is simply staggering. May I ask for your attention, please?!"

Robinson smashed the container on the ground. Accompanied by a powerful explosion, thick yellow clouds rose to the sky.

"Captain Crusoe! Don't stand there like you're rooted to the spot! Get going!" Murata urged.

"Damn it, Murata, where are you?!"

"Nmo!"

Scared to death, the sheep herd stormed off with thundering hooves. There was a concert of coughing from the Steppe Brotherhood. Flynn's soldiers came running by. The musclemen blocked the path of the horsemen.

"Milady, you must flee!"

They were loyal down to the last muscle fiber.

"Hurry, hold onto the coat of one of the sheep!" yelled Flynn.

"Is that supposed to be a joke?!"

"Good heavens, Captain! Surely you know how to ride a sheep! I thought you were a soldier!"

In the distance, I heard someone call out, "Hey you sheep thieves! Come back!"

Sorry, but we're really in a hurry.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 by kannnichtfranz

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Kyou Kara Maou

Japanese Novel 6 / German Novel 7: *Of Brothers and Sheep*

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CHAPTER 4

Flynn returned from her scouting expedition and pulled a face like she didn't know how to best give vent to her anger.

"Captain, we have a problem. We're up to our neck in problems!"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. But we waited here for you obediently, didn't we? We could have made a run for it."

"Of course, you're right," admitted Flynn. "I must thank you for that."

She looked down at the back of one of the lazily grazing animals and snapped her tongue in disgust. Her ladylike behavior vanished as if it had been blown away. She had turned into a very typical girl next door.

We'd just barely managed to escape the Steppe Brotherhood by clinging to the backs and stomachs of the sheep. We finally let ourselves sink down into the grass outside a village. Of course, about thirty head of sheep were also in the traveling party.

During our escape, I caught a glance at a signpost. The path to the east led to Big Simaron, and the path to the west into the motherland of Small Simaron.

After Flynn had impressed upon Murata and me not to run away, she'd made her way into the village. She wanted to get some information there.

I wondered at the fact that she'd left her prisoners behind with no guard. The chain of unpredictable events must have really put her off her stride.

"The border with Big Simaron is reportedly tight. Not even the shopkeepers and sheepherders who cross the border every month can get through easily. The residents seem unnerved. The soldiers seem to be the only ones who know what's going on. When I look at all the uproar, though, it's only a matter of time until the populace becomes fully aware of the situation."

"Don't forget that we're sheep thieves," Murata chipped in impassively.

One of the sheep raised its head and looked at us through soft gray eyes. Perhaps it felt we were speaking to it.

"No, no one would make this kind of fuss over a few stolen sheep."

I petted the animal's head.

"This is crazy," I complained. "A border blockade just because of a family argument? What parents would immediately set up such severe safeguards against their own daughter?"

"It doesn't have anything to do with family any more, Captain. We're up against

an enemy with its sights set on Carolina. As soon as my father finds out that Norman Gilbit can no longer lead the country, he'll immediately try to overthrow the princedom and take it for himself."

"Shoo, get away from here!" Flynn roared at the sheep. "Why won't these dratted wool bundles disappear?! Where am I supposed to sit down?!"

Every animal, without exception, raised its head, feeling unjustly snubbed.

"Nmo!" they protested crossly.

"Now don't look at me like that! Because of you, all my plans fell through!"

Shoving the sheep aside, she flopped down at the foot of a tree. Like a young girl, she cowered there with her arms wrapped around her knees.

Pretty soon she's going to start crying, I thought. Her back looked so darn small.

"How did it get this far...?" she sighed.

"I can tell you that," I replied.

Meanwhile, Ken Murata counted the beige heads of sheep and estimated the market value of the wool.

Leaning against the huge tree trunk, I looked down at Flynn. "All this stuff happened because we sought out your estate," I said. "We hoped somebody there would help us get back home again. Then you locked us up and, last but not least, you abducted us to drag us with you all this way. Does that answer your question?!"

"You're right, Captain. I apologize."



Flynn's sudden hindsight caught me by surprise. She was a few years older than I was and up to now, she'd always been so self-confident. I became weak.

"I don't want to hear an apology from you. That won't change anything. I just want to understand the reason we got into this mess. You understand that, right?"

"Indeed."

A bell rang several times. A quiet little group stepped out of a building that looked like a church. In the middle of the group, men were carrying a snow white box. Judging from the size and shape, it was probably a casket. The silent procession walked past us, then turned down a path that led up to a hill with a

gentle incline.

Involuntarily, I tucked my thumbs behind my back, which is traditional for children in Japan when they see a funeral. When I noticed it, I gave a tortured smile. I wasn't an elementary school student any more. And I also wasn't in Japan any more.

"It looks like someone has died," I observed.

"A child."

"How do you know that?"

I focused my gaze on the retreating funeral procession. Now I recognized a woman who could have been the mother of the child.

"It's a white casket, so it was a boy. Adults use a brown casket, girls use an auburn casket. Child soldiers are buried in a white casket to praise their courage and patriotism. The boy was at most twelve or thirteen."

"But the war hasn't even begun yet! Or has it?! Twelve, you say? How can a twelve year old be a soldier?"

"That's nothing unusual here."

Flynn lifted her head from her knees and looked up to the sky, which held some drifting clouds. A small bird flew past the sun, which was shining weakly between a few clouds.

"The Steppe Brotherhood doesn't have its own country, and hasn't for over a hundred years. It was always an organization entrusted with the task of training soldiers sent to it from other nations. The Brotherhood possessed enough estates and assets, but it never overcame the status of an educational institution. Even after the invasion of the continent by both Simaron empires,

the community remained what it had always been. It saw to the training of the men entrusted to it, nothing more. It didn't make any difference what country they came from or what region. The only goal was to turn them into good soldiers.

"Through the course of wars that sometimes lasted years, one country after the next fell to Simaron's rule -- nearly the whole eastern half of the continent, including Carolia. Under Simaron's rule, the terms and conditions gradually changed for the Steppe Brotherhood. The people who were sent to us to be educated were simply too young. The laws of Simaron say that a boy must become a soldier by the age of twelve. But at that age, there are large differences between individuals. Children who grow up in poor villages are usually gaunt and in poor health. Some are too weak to hold a sword properly and are thus totally unsuitable to be soldiers. Despite that, my father and brother approached the training like in old times. The casualty rate during the training increased. No wonder -- they were only children, their bodies weren't fully developed yet. They couldn't understand the danger of battle. For better or worse, the Brotherhood made such children into soldiers and let them loose on the world. Meanwhile, they weren't sent back to the individual armies of various nations, but rather became soldiers of the superpower Simaron. I grew up at one of these training sites, with the clinging of swords and war cries day in and day out. The young soldiers' cries of pain could be heard all the way through our estate."

Finally, it seemed Murata had identified the sheep with the highest market value. Happily cheering, a young girl came running up and enclosed the wool-mountain -- it was the size of a small motorbike -- in her arms. Her mother, who'd followed, laughed with Murata.

"When my marriage into the Gilbit family was certain, my father and brother were so happy they couldn't even calm down again. It was their big opportunity to seize possession of a country of their own. Since they would be related to the prince by marriage, they hoped to become part of the government without the colonial power taking it the wrong way. Piece by piece, they wanted to gather

more power for themselves. Even if they were never recognized as a state, their status would definitely have increased beyond a mere institution. The influence that the colonial power exercised over its vassal states was comparatively small. Carolia possesses a large harbor and good relationships with the owners of merchant ships. My father had no intention of involving himself in those areas of business. The Gilbits were to continue to take care of those matters, and keep the profits for themselves. A violent takeover by the Brotherhood would only provoke discontent among the tradespeople."

"We saw the harbor of Gilbit. Many huge ships were making anchor there. The streets were well-built and the seniors could really knuckle down. I really liked the harbor."

"Thank you, Captain." Flynn's smile reached her bright green eyes.

"There's one thing I still don't understand. Although your husband died, you still didn't want to allow your father into the country. Instead, you wore that stuffy mask for years. Why play that crazy game? Were you sorry to give up the power once you had it?"

"No, that wasn't the reason." Flynn shook her head slowly and her long hair slid from her lap.

"I hate them, the Steppe Brotherhood! Year after year, boys were conscripted from Carolia. Supposedly, Simaron needs every soldier it can get for the coming war against the demons. If they're so keen on the idea of war, they should fight it with their own people! All those high-born noblewomen who've never walked through mud and dirt. All the noble gentlemen who've never taken care of their own horse, they should fight by themselves! If I give Carolia over to my father and brother, they'll convert the whole country into a giant army barracks. Then it will no longer be the nation of Carolia my husband loved so dearly. Carolia is not a country for soldiers to flounce around in."

Aha, so that's the way it was.

"The demons won't participate in any war against humans," I said. "At least, not as long as there's a spark of life in me."

"I don't understand... how can you make that promise to me? I can judge very well from your black-as-night hair and eyes that you must be a powerful demon of high birth. And there are also those terrifying powers you command..." Flynn hesitated for a moment with her fingers touching her lips.

"Since you're a descendant of the Wincotts, you surely possess even mightier powers, even if you don't give that impression at the moment. But you wouldn't have any influence over the entire Demon Empire, would you? The demons are governed by a king, and anyone who isn't loyal to him will find himself a head shorter. Once this terrible king sets his demons in motion, no one could hold them off."

Excuse me? Who the hell had set this false rumor loose in the world?

Suddenly I was uncertain. This information about the demons was, of course, complete nonsense. Despite that, Flynn seemed to know what she was doing, and that made a big impression on me. Although Flynn wasn't allowed to rule as Lady Carolia, she was much better suited to be a ruler than I was.

"You're a good queen," I admitted.

"Me? What gives you that idea? It's not true. My husband was a good prince. The people loved him. But when I became his bride, stones were thrown at my carriage when I traveled. 'How can he marry a daughter of the Steppe Brotherhood?!" the people ranted. I couldn't hold that against them. For generations, my family had sent innocent people into battle and earned their money doing so."

"But that was your father! The people can't blame you for that."

"I'm not much better," Flynn said with a sarcastic undertone in her voice.

Murata let out a strange cry and turned around to face us. Then he flailed his right arm around and yelled like crazy.

"Damn it, what's wrong with you, Murak... Robinson?! Did you get stung?!"

"Good gracious! Your friend, Captain, is truly a puzzle to me. I still can't explain where he might have hidden that bottle that caused the smoke. A few days ago, I got a completely different impression from him..."

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" Murata yelled. "I sold a sheep, man! And his new mama is even named Mary! Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb! Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb!"

Well, super. As long as he didn't expect us to sing along.

With the growing dimensions of our money pouch, hope reasserted itself that everything might work itself out.

With the sale of thirty sheep, we earned a tidy bundle of money that had Flynn looking into the future a little more optimistically. She seemed utterly determined to deliver Captain Crusoe and Tokyo Magic Robinson to Big Simaron, no matter the cost!

From carriage travelers without a care in the world, we'd become refugees being hunted everywhere. Flynn didn't take much time obtaining our disguises and gear. She decided on three plain sets of men's working clothes with no hesitation.

"Flynn changed in the shop's restroom. She gets quirkier all the time," I observed.

"You said it, old friend," Murata agreed.

To stand out less, Flynn pulled my baseball cap low over her eyes. Although her face was mostly hidden, I thought she looked really good. Actually, I liked her much better in the new outfit than before. A blond beauty with a pony tail and a baseball cap -- I could typically only get a view like that from the satellite transmissions of Major League Baseball.

Okay, sportsfan, settle down now! This woman is dangerous! She locked us up and is in the process of kidnapping us!

"A question, Shibuya. Is it possible that your taste in girls is a little extreme?"

"Huh? What do you mean, extreme?"

"Well, you either like older women or lolitas."

"Excuse me?! Why do you say that?!"

Murata threw me a critical look over the rim of his lenses and I started to get a little nervous.

"N...n...nonsense! Whomever I fall in love with is pure coincidence!"

"It's okay, it's okay, you don't have to turn so red over it. I was just thinking of your cute little one from the lower classes, with the short haircut and the childlike face, that you went out with right at the end of middle school. She looked like an elementary school student."

"My god, that was a guy! From the baseball team! That was a sports haircut! And of course I wasn't going out with him!"

That's the way false rumors are set loose in the world.

"Admit it, Robinson," I changed the topic. "Even if Flynn might be too old for me,

she's got a great neck, and her hairline is just unbelievable, isn't it?"

I stuck my hand out to clap Murata on the shoulder.

"Help, what's this?!" I called in dismay.

"Nmo!"

Instead of Murata's shoulder, I'd got hold of the back of an animal that was already quite familiar to me.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" I asked in astonishment.

"Oops, looks like somebody has followed us. Mary's lamb is living up to its reputation."

"Well, great! And what do we do with him now? Flynn isn't going to like this at all."

As expected, Flynn, who'd been organizing some winter clothes for the cold weather, let out a sharp scream when she discovered the sheep.

"Iiiiiieh! Why is that thing here?! But we sold them all! They'll never let us on board a ship with a sheep!"

"Why a ship? We aren't near the sea," I wondered.

Our travel companion, cozy in a leather jacket, propped her hands on her hips and said arrogantly, "The Steppe Brotherhood has secured the borders to Big Simaron. I've decided to travel via Small Simaron to trick them. If we travel along the Longalbalu River north to its mouth, we can smuggle ourselves on board a ship on the coast. That way we can have our choice of Big Simaron harbor cities. It's true that it's a considerable detour, but this route is the safest."

"A ship, then..." I sighed.

I really didn't have anything against ships, but once I had been on board a luxury liner that was attacked by pirates. I had no desire to live through such a scary experience a second time.

--

The river that was to bring us north was damned wide. One could always see to the other side of even the biggest rivers in Japan, which was definitely not true here.

"Are you sure this Longalbalu isn't perhaps a sea?" I asked, in light of the dimensions.

"No, it's definitely a river. And a ship is much more comfortable and faster than traveling over land, isn't that so?" Flynn boasted self-confidently.

In the light of the setting sun, the surface of the water took on an eerie violet color.

"No more joking around, Flynn! You really want to get on board that barge? It won't bother Robinson and me, but what about you?"

"Of course I'm coming on board, Captain. We have no choice. Three suspected criminals and a farm animal? A normal passenger ship would never accept a troop like ours."

Dried grass poked up through the gangplank everywhere. At the end of it, a ship lay in anchor which surpassed all our expectations.

Although it was the size of a tourist ship in Hakona, its design was shockingly plain. It looked like an oversized rescue boat with a partial overhang. Nearly the whole deck was covered with wooden crates. In the small area where people

could take shelter from the rain, the people were packed in like sardines.

A woman like Flynn, who'd lived on a grand estate up till yesterday, honestly wanted in on this kind of adventure?

"Rad!" marveled Murata. "Looks like the Nile. Gosh, maybe a murder will take place here! Like in an Agatha Christie novel!"

"You won't take it? You can't be serious!" we heard Flynn's voice. "That's not counterfeit, those are real bills from Small Simaron."

Flynn stood at the ticket counter. The man across from her gave no indication he would take the bills.

"What's wrong here?" I asked. "Should the Captain take the situation in hand?"

"I don't know which army your worthy Sir Consort has come from, but these days no one is so crazy as to take Simaron currency. After all, war could break out any moment," the ticket seller growled.

"Only amateurs would fail to see the danger of a price slump and happily continue taking Simaron money as payment. We have no idea where you're from. Despite that, we're letting you on board at the last minute. So naturally we would want to see gold, silver, or precious stones as payment."

Flynn pressed her lips tightly together for a moment and drew her hand up to her left ear. I turned away fast. I can't watch when a woman removes her earring. It looks so damned painful.

"Will you be satisfied with that?" Flynn asked.

"Mmm, that'll do nicely. But we can't give any change." With a self-satisfied smile, the man pocketed the precious metal. It was surely very expensive. Probably a gift from her husband. Why would she do that? Why would this

woman go so far?

Robinson and I could only watch from the sidelines. Then we marched over the plank with the sheep on a leash. As soon as we were on board, the ship raised anchor and gave itself up to the gentle current.

The evening sun sank into the horizon and the sky took on the color of a mandarin orange.

Although we'd decked ourselves out in thick coats, the cold sank into our bones with the onset of night. The few passengers who'd come on board with us had their collars turned up high. They used the crates as protection from the wind and huddled together tightly.

"Why doesn't anyone go into the cabin?" I mused.

It didn't take long for this question to be answered, since we decided to flee inside to escape the cold.

When I opened the door to the only large cabin space the ship had, there were over a hundred men of all ages hunkered down in the comparatively warm room. They all had the faces of gangsters. They were clad in uniforms -- bright pink one-pieces. When they noticed us, they all went silent and stared in our direction.

Over a hundred pairs of bloodshot eyes took us in their sights. I'd have liked to slam the door behind me and take to my heels but, out of pure fear, I didn't even dare turn my back on them.

"Erm -- which team do you gentlemen belong to?"

"Psst, Robin! Are you nuts?!" I barked at Ken Murata, but I couldn't get him to be quiet.

"Jeez, just look, they're all wearing uniforms."

So what?! Just because people are wearing the same clothing doesn't make them athletes by a long shot.

The gangster-faces all bared their teeth threateningly and began to yowl.

"We're a team of murderers!"

"Together we've slaughtered a thousand people, if not two thousand!"

Help!

When I lowered my gaze in fear, I saw chains and iron balls on the men's legs.

"This boat is a prisoner transport..."

Too late. The shore was already far away; there was no turning back now.

Flynn became very pale all of a sudden.

"Right now I'm feeling a really urgent physical need..." she murmured.

Too bad the toilets were on the other end of the room.

[CHAPTER 5](#)

Chapter 5 by kannnichtfranz

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Kyou Kara Maou

Japanese Novel 6 / German Novel 7: *Of Brothers and Sheep*

Translated from the German edition by kannnichtfranz

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CHAPTER 5

This was truly the worst journey of all time!

With his sword drawn, Lord Wolfram von Bielefeld ran towards the stern. What was pelting down from above wasn't rainwater, but seawater. The ship tilted strongly to the port side. The passengers slipped and slid on the wet deck, tumbling back and forth.

"Hurry! Anyone unarmed get below deck! Hold on and stay calm!" roared a voice.

Wolfram had experienced sea voyages affected by catastrophes before. For example, there had once been pirates who wanted to sell all the passengers into slavery. Another time, he and Yuri were mistaken for a married couple who abused their child.

"But this is the first time I've come across an attack by giant squid, damn it!"

Wolfram lunged with his sword and hacked at the gray squid arm that had wrapped itself around the stern. It was as thick as a hundred year old tree trunk; a single sucker was bigger than a toilet bowl in Blood Pledge Castle.

The people around him had all armed themselves with diverse cutting tools and fought against this enormous piece of seafood. A soldier on leave wielded a sword in each hand, and one adventurer had an axe. The head cook swung his giant knife; his two colleagues stabbed with butcher knives and iron skewers. A quiet guy fought grimly with an exceptionally sharp sword.

Even the women were competently putting their backs into it. Only the younger ones enrolled in their first cooking class seemed hesitant. Should they really cut into the flesh of the squid with their cooking knives?

"We've almost got it! Just keep at it! The squid is dangerous, but it's also important for our provisions!"

When a tentacle wrapped around the stern again, the ship began to sway so violently it threatened to go under any moment. If the squid were to pull up the planks, the fate of the humans would be sealed.

"I did it!" one of the young maids called. "You see, Sir Kitchenmaster? It's the first time I've dismembered a squid! Isn't it wonderful!"

At that moment, the monster disappeared back into the deep sea. It left its severed seventh tentacle behind on the flooded deck with the broken mast.

The people left the deck loudly bragging about their own heroic deeds -- with fresh pieces of meat as souvenirs. There would be plentiful squid for dinner.

"Would the ladies and gentlemen who sustained only light injuries please come

to me under your own power!" Gisela von Kleist called to the injured in the cabins, as danger was finally averted. "If you have a head injury, please wait where you are until I come to you!"

Her companions ran from one end to the other to determine the number and location of the injured. Lord von Bielefeld, who'd done a lot of hard work, wiped the sweat from his brow. He wanted to talk to Gisela, but he didn't manage it.

"Hey, you lazy ducks!" she yelled. "Get your asses in motion! The wounded can't wait, so get a move on!"

Wolfram stared at his old acquaintance, dumbfounded. He had never known her to be like this.

"Hey you! Did you sleep through your training? What've you got legs for, hm?!"

"To transport the wounded, Field Marshall!"

"What?! You've got time to answer?! Get to work instead! There'll be no napping here, so run, you turtle!"

All at once, Gisela's tone changed: "So, young miss, please show me your forehead. Everything's going to be okay, there won't even be a scar... Oh, Your Excellency!" She noticed Wolfram and smiled.

"You did a great job. There's still a piece of sucker stuck to your face," she observed.

"A question, Gisela... does this mean your rank is only Field Marshall?"

"Oh no, Your Excellency. I can't boast many heroic deeds, but I do hold an officer's rank. That's hard to avoid, when one has served so long. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it's nothing. Forget it."

"Field Marshall is Lady's Gisela's nickname, Your Excellency," the bald Dacascos explained, completely out of breath. He'd come running from the ship's cargo area.

"Because she -- always orders -- her subordinates -- around like that," he gasped.

Wolfram hadn't known that.

Dark green eyes that shone with compassion, an expression full of motherly love, healing hands -- who would have guessed that this talented healer with the pale fingers could transform into a devilish Field Marshall? Although Wolfram had known Gisela since childhood, he had never once noticed that trait in her. He was bewildered.

"I have to tell Yuri about this," he stammered.

"Dacascos, we don't have time for meaningless chatter. Are there still wounded below?"

"No, Field Marshall! Only a few scrapes. But Kinan has disappeared."

"What? Since when? Maybe the squid caught him and dragged him into the sea? Although, I find that hard to imagine..."

Wolfram knew what she meant. Kinan was the man with the aloof face and cold glance. Wolfram had also imagined him to be the strongest fighter among the four.

"His possessions are also gone. His clothes, arrows, and sword. And his quiver, of course."

Kinan had never let the thick, sturdy quiver out of his grasp.

"What about the rescue boats?" Wolfram cut in.

"No, I don't think there are many rescue boats on this ship... Wait a minute, Your Excellency! You don't think he really...! How far is it now to shore? The distance is much too great, a single person, rowing alone, could never survive!"

"Not alone, perhaps."

"But why would Kinan sneak away?" Gisela wondered.

A very good question.

--

Meanwhile, Gwendal von Voltaire felt so exhausted that he didn't even have the energy to listen to dispatches and give orders.

He couldn't complain about a lack of information -- more news came streaming through the door every moment.

The only thing Gwendal could say in response was: "Continue the search mission."

The advance guard had already arrived in Simaron, but that empire covered about ten times as much surface area as the Demon Empire. Without a concrete lead, it was like searching for a needle in a haystack. To increase the probability of success, the search area urgently needed to be reduced.

Gwendal threw a small white card into the fire and watched it go up in flames. Despite the fact that his long legs were crossed with his toes pointed towards the fire, he didn't feel an ounce of warmth in his body. Was the boy equipped to handle the cold? In Simaron, the onset of winter was imminent.

Whether human or demon, everyone was sympathetic to Yuri. Luckily, he'd been brought up as a commoner, so he shouldn't have any difficulty going to ground in a city. That was a small consolation, at least.

Noblemen often let themselves be ruled by pointless pride. It could sometimes drive them to reject any helping hand offered to them in the enemy territory of the humans.

Yuri, however, knew no shame when it came to contact with humans. As long as he continued to be receptive when it came to foreign aid, at least Gwendal wouldn't have to worry that the boy might freeze.

"Where the hell is he?" Gwendal muttered irritably, once he'd convinced himself he was alone in his office.

Hopefully Yuri hadn't forgotten who he was and what dangers he would face as a double black. Had he managed to hide his identity? Was he aware of the problems between the two Simaron states and the Demon Empire? Had the Schoolmaster adequately educated him on that topic?

Why had he ever surrendered the duties of King's Advisor and Schoolmaster to Lord von Kleist? Gwendal was beginning to regret that decision. He'd have brought more strength to the matter if he'd been involved himself. It probably would've been for the best if he'd taken complete control of the reins there.

Swift steps reverberated through the hall; they slowed as they approached Gwendal's door. Even the soldiers tried not to waste a single second. They too wanted to bring the king's whereabouts to light as soon as possible.

"Request permission to enter, Your Excellency!"

"It's not necessary to feign calm! I've already said that running in the hallway doesn't bother me."

"Yes, sir!"

The color of his collar pin identified the soldier as a palace guard, but Gwendal didn't recognize his face. Did he belong to a different sector? The gaunt soldier stepped up to the desk. With his gaze lowered, he handed Lord von Voltaire two pieces of paper.

"I have a report, Your Excellency! This afternoon, we received these two messages from a civilian newshandler in the city. So they don't come from one of our outposts."

"A civilian newshandler?"

"Yes, sir, Your Excellency! It's a business venture for news delivery by the name of *Fly, White Dove, Fly*. Doves are sent out with correspondence, and the fees are calculated according to the respective distances traveled. I have to say, it's a well thought out operation."

"I'm familiar with it."

In comparison to the military communication networks of the individual nations, there were large advantages to the private ventures in the areas of speed and security. The advantage of *Fly, White Dove, Fly* was the fact that they had branches covering the entire world. In the last few years, the demand had risen continually. Today, it was safe to assume that this company had an office in almost every important city.

The workers were very familiar with the flight paths of their doves. The animals were exchanged at countless intermediate stations so that the messages could reach any city in the world.

"Aha, the doves were changed eight times since Small Simaron. This message is from Carolia," Gwendal established. "Why Carolia, of all places?"

The writing on one of the messages was difficult to decipher. The wind and weather had probably contributed to that. The king was sighted with one companion in the autonomous region of Carolia in the colonial territory of Small Simaron -- so said the message. In addition, it contained a question: *His Majesty is as enchanting as ever. But why has he been allowed to travel without any protection whatsoever? I request a reasonable explanation!*

The second letter had been sent from Small Simaron, one day later. The message said: *Isn't it a little irresponsible to send two children out traveling alone?*

The sender's name was not legible, but a symbol at the bottom right corner was familiar to Gwendal. Lord Adalbert von Grantz! The man who'd betrayed the demon race and turned his back on his homeland.

"Damn it, the boy had contact with Adalbert?!"

"But Your Excellency! Isn't that man extremely dangerous?"

Gwendal didn't agonize so much about Adalbert as about the phrase "two children" that had been used in the letter. Was the boy traveling with someone about his own age, or was his companion possibly even younger than he was? Yuri was totally capable of something like that. In the end he had adopted the human child he was caring for. That would be nothing new.

Gwendal's worry only grew with this letter. But at least the first letter implied that Yuri had been in Carolia. There weren't many routes out of Carolia. It wouldn't be easy to get from there to Big Simaron.

Gwendal stood, his boots echoing against the floor as he walked. He spread a map out on the desk with a sweeping motion. In the middle of the heavily annotated continent sat Carolia.

"An announcement to all troops on their way to Small Simaron. Immediately upon arrival, all paths to Carolia must be monitored! From the territory of the

Steppe Brotherhood all the way to the bordering districts, we cannot allow even the smallest clue to slip through our fingers!"

After the soldier left in a hurry, Gwendal let his eyes wander over the messages a second time. This time he didn't throw them in the fireplace, but rather tucked them safely away in an inner pocket of his jacket.

Adalbert von Grantz was, of course, dangerous, yet the man had gone to the trouble of sending this message. That didn't seem to imply he had any intention of harming Yuri at this time.

But couldn't he have simply caught Yuri and protected him until Gwendal's people could arrive on the scene?

"Not willing to go so far for love after all," murmured Gwendal.

Finally he too left the warm, lonely room.

--

Lady Anissina von Kavernikov's new tailor-made laboratory was located in the cellar of Blood Pledge Castle.

Since time was of the essence, many parts of the laboratory were hurriedly thrown together. However, the noise protection was flawless. After all, the castle's inhabitants shouldn't be woken by screams in the night. For this reason, the door was especially thick and heavy. As soon as one opened it, one was inundated with noise.

"No, I don't want to! She's going to kill me!" a child's voice howled.

It was anything but peaceful in the laboratory.

After Gwendal pressed the door shut with his back, he looked for the source of

the screams.

Hollering and crying, a child he wasn't familiar with had latched onto the knees of an older woman. The nanny was completely at a loss. She didn't want to go against Lady von Kavernikov's instructions, but should she really deliver her young charge to his tormentor, just like that?

With an unconcerned smile on her face, Greta stepped up to the child. It had been a very long time since Gwendal had seen Greta smile. Faced with the younger child, the girl instinctively fell into the role of an older sister.

"You look very young, how old might you be? Three?" Greta asked.

"Twelve."

"Whaaaat?! Twelve? That can't be! You're older than me?!"

"The physical development of demon children varies significantly from child to child," Anissina explained. "But this boy is about average. Ah, Gwendal, you're just in time!"

When Anissina caught sight of her childhood friend, she set off towards him. Her red hair, bound in a pony tail, glowed like fire. Her eyes, the bright blue of a summer sky, sparked like dew.

"May I introduce Rinji, the second in rank of the Wincotts. He's Susanna Julia's nephew. I invited him here for an experiment. His blood is the strongest of all the living Wincotts. I hope that with his help, I can bring the Wincott Poison to its full effect!"

Although the laboratory was located in the basement, it had a window through which light shone. Madam Butterfly Gunter stood near it with half-opened eyes, shrouded in silence. If Gwendal strained his ears, he could hear strange breathy noises coming from the doll's body: "Bsssst, bsssst."

"What's the meaning of that?" Gwendal wanted to know.

"He's just sleeping," Greta answered.

The doll's half-open eyes didn't seem quite normal to Gwendal. That sight would give people nightmares.

When Anissina advanced towards the young Rinji von Wincott, the child let out a deafening howl. His light brown hair was long like a girl's. Wet from an abundance of tears, it clung to his cheeks. He screeched with an unnaturally shrill voice that caused the nanny to hurriedly rub his back with her hand.

"Waaaaah, that's the Devil-woman Anissina, waaaaah!"

"What's this?! Twelve years old and still scared of the Devil-woman Anissina?" Anissina said with a grin.

"The Devil-woman rips the guts out of children and eats them!"

Anissina had never anticipated that children would hate her so much, just because she'd made herself the protagonist of her own books. Gwendal observed his childhood playmate's back, which was bristling with vitality. Even today, she seemed full of drive. To be honest, she took great delight in spreading terror in small children. Lady Anissina propped her hands on her hips and commanded in a forceful voice: "Be still, boy! Otherwise I might still shave your head and peel off your scalp!"

"Waaaaah!" Rinji sobbed, burying his face between the legs of his nanny.

Anissina bent over him. "Don't you want to know what would happen to you after that?" she asked.

For a moment, the childish wails cut off. Timidly, Rinji lifted his head and focused

his frightened gaze on Anissina. "What would happen then?"

"Then I would cut open your skull with a saw, like a flash!"

"Waaaaah!"

Anissina sounded so terrifying, as if she might really make good on her words. She did already have practice using her magic-driven saw on corpses.

For a while, the child gave himself over to the fantasy and tried to imagine the pain. Then he lifted his head again and asked: "And what would happen then?"

"Plop! Then the sawed-off top of your skull would be lifted like a lid, and your brain would be placed in salt!"

"Iiiiiieh! Salt! And then?"

Anissina was a masterful storyteller.

While Rinji von Wincott was listening to her, his tears finally dried up. This boy was the descendent of the Wincotts that the humans were looking for. Because he was still a child, Anissina had to be a little more careful with her experimentation.

Anissina led Rinji to Snow Gunter. She wanted to test whether the Wincott Poison really functioned as described in *The Handbook of Murder by Poison*.

Since the poison had only half-spread through Snow Gunter's body, a perfect reaction could not be expected, but she assumed that he would obey the boy's commands.

Rinji stretched his hand towards Snow Gunter, who sprung into an upright position, light as a feather. His body swayed to and fro.

"Await -- orders -- please!"

"Waaaaah..."

Immediately, tears returned to the child's eyes. The frozen beauty had suddenly come to life before his eyes -- that would have frightened anyone.

Unfortunately, Snow Gunter was also still stark naked. For this reason, tears also appeared in the eyes of the nanny -- tears of joy.

"He'll do everything I want now?" Rinji asked.

"As you can see," Anissina confirmed. "It's really fantastic! So *The Handbook of Murder by Poison* was right. Anyone brought to a death-like state by the Wincott Poison is completely submissive to the Wincotts."

"May I give him a command?"

"You may. But don't take it too far."

Rinji von Wincott began with a harmless attempt: "Sing!"

Snow Gunter hummed an avant-garde melody to those in attendance. Unfortunately, this brought to light his tone-deafness, which he had successfully kept secret up to now.

Rinji was seized by overconfidence. He felt like he'd suddenly been made king, and let himself get carried away with a very audacious command: "Snow Gunter! Kill the Devil-woman Anissina!"

"Under -- stood."

"*Damn it!*" Gwendal thought, but it was already too late.

The massive Snow Gunter had already toppled awkwardly onto Anissina. His speed was admirable considering he'd been lying in ice up to now.

Gwendal tried to throw himself between them to protect his childhood playmate, but he was a step too late. The soulless body already had Anissina by the neck.

Anissina crossed both arms in front of her chest and pulled apart with all her strength, so that Snow Gunter's hands were forced to let go. Using her petiteness to her advantage, she jumped right under his nose and punched him in the chin. Rinji's marionette stumbled backwards and Anissina delivered a forceful kick to his neck. This kick catapulted her opponent all the way to the back corner of the room.

"Awesome! Brilliant! The Devil-woman Anissina is the strongest!"

The child did a dance of joy.

CHAPTER 6: COMING SOON

Chapter 6

Chapter 6[edit]

How horrible! In order to use the bathroom, we have to walk through a bunch of murderers to the other side of the room.

I like redecorating and renovations so I suddenly want to pray for a carpenter to come along and do something about this.

“... You think you can hold it?”

“Even if I can hold it now, I won’t be able to for long... hey, what are you making a woman say!?”

“Travelling makes people kind. We’ve even become close enough to talk about our biological functions.”

We three travelling buddies are talking together in a huddle.

“Why don’t we escort you this time, Ms. Flynn. If you’re too embarrassed to go alone, we’ll go with you!” I offer.

“Ah, that’s a good idea! It’ll feel good.”

“No! No way!”

I understand why she’s refusing.

For guys, it’s perfectly normal to do that, but it’s probably humiliating for girls. But between shame and putting your life in danger, it’s obvious which is the better choice.

“If I can’t use the powder room, I’d rather die! Make a path for me somehow. You know, using that ‘Tokyo Comic Show’ technique or whatever.”

The two of us are completely floored. Not just because she guessed the correct name, but because we suddenly had to negotiate with a hundred prisoners^[1].

“That’s impossible, totally impossible. I might have been able to do something if they were petty criminals but these are murderers, you know? And together

they've killed over a thousand people. If this was America, they'd be going to jail for 300 years. What am I supposed to do against-"

"A~nd what are you going on about little lamb?"

The prisoners in pink laughed vulgarly. Calling someone a little lamb is rude. Flynn would get mad at being called that even if she hadn't been ruling a small country for the past three years (in place of someone else, though).

"Nmo?"

T-Zou walked forward. Ah, I get it. That's the little lamb.

"If ya wanna use the bathroom just go and use it, hahaha."

"If we're in the way, just jump over us, hahaha."

"... Nmo!"

On my left side, the sheep started breathing roughly through her nose. Her back is shaking slightly.

"Wh-what's wrong, T-Zou?"

I didn't have time to pull on her leash and stop her. As soon as I noticed she had fluffed up her fur in a threatening way, she had already dashed into the room. The size of a moped or a large bike, the sheep is wielding her hooves as a deadly weapon and is kicking around the men.

The murderers of a thousand people scream and run around the room. However, because they're chained to iron balls, they can't move very quickly and there are some who got their feet crushed by the iron balls of other prisoners and are squatting down and crying. The boat started swaying so strangely that even the helmsman got worried and came to see what was going on.

"Wh-why is T-Zou..?"

"Wow, that was surprising. She's a wolf in sheep's clothing."

Murata, you... I don't even feel like commenting on your antics anymore. The helmsman who came to see what was going on is laughing at the scary faced, brawny prisoners jumping around.

"They say if you laugh in front of sheep they'll mutiny, but if only one sheep

does this then a bunch of sheep would be really scary.”

It's a proverb from a foreign culture.

After wreaking complete havoc, T-Zou comes back content. Even her breathing is calm. Flynn, who used the opportunity to go to the bathroom, also comes back with a content look on her face. They both look like they can say ‘That's enough for today.’

Since there's no point in spending more time in the room full of men, we return to the rapidly cooling deck. Even though we're feeling a bit more confident concerning them, there's no way that we'd be able to sleep in that room all packed together. Even if we managed to grab a corner, there's only enough space to sit holding your knees. If so, we should just deal with the cold weather, lie down in some sleeping bags and sing ‘Winter Constellations’ or something^[2].

“Halt!”

Called out to in a period drama style, the three of us stop in surprise. Slowly and carefully turning around, we see that a clear path has been made all the way to the back where a mafia-boss looking guy is camped out. He's sitting so I can't know for sure, but he's such a large man that it looks like he can easily jump two-meters. The prison food may have been really good because his chest and shoulder width are both extreme. If I gave him a nickname, it would be straight and simple: Human Mountain Range.

There's an X-shaped scar on his newly shaved head.

“The Commander has a message. Come closer.”

While the three of us were hesitating, T-Zou began walking forward with a menacing expression. Even though she's biologically a girl, she's a manly animal.

Commander Mountain Range is sitting cross-legged with burly legs and is holding a round object in his lap. He's continuously stroking the well-polished, shiny, amber ball with his palm. Hm? There's a hollow in the middle. It's placed just around where a primate's eye socket would.....

“A skull!? Is that human bone?”

"This is Ms. Terrine," answered a wise looking old man with a goatee. "The Commander brought along the remains of one of the people he killed with him. However, to be honest... they were already bleached so it's very likely he killed them a long time ago."

The last bit was in a secretive whisper. Then from Ms. Terrine's viewpoint, wouldn't she have a grudge? She's completely bones though. Commander Mountain Range was glaring at us with ocher eyes that could have frozen blood, but he immediately dropped his gaze to Ms. Skull. Then, he called out in a threatening voice...

"You've got something to say to these guys, wight Mishy Terrine?"

... to the skull.

"... Mishy Terrine?"

And 'wight?' Saying stuff like that with such a powerful voice is just as creepy as Akiko Wada singing an Aya Matsuura song. But, that's my own individual preference so I won't go criticizing that [3].

"Especially to this woman. You feel like you've met this person, wight Mishy Terrine? So you really wanna know who and where she's from, wight?"

"Me? I don't have any acquaintances who speak with skulls."

"Don't mock the Commander!"

"The Commander and Terry-berry are important to us!"

"Don't look at him with pity!"

"Don't say he's creepy!"

She didn't say that. And anyway, what's 'Terry-berry?' Terry-berry?

Perhaps because we had a (wolf wearing the clothes of a) sheep, Flynn used a very lady-like phrase. Her chin is thrust forward and her face is set.

"If you're going to ask someone's name, you should introduce yourself fi-"

"Ah, good evenin'! I'm Robinson. This here's Captain Crusoe."

"Evenin'."

"Hey, he was talking to me. Me!"

Flynn panicking after being lightly-pon ignored was funny. That pose she had while pointing at herself and looking back and forth between Murata and me was cute, too. Well, calling a woman five years older than you 'cute' is rude^[4].

"My name is Flynn. Flynn... I won't say my last name."

Commander Mountain Range's ghastly face suddenly brightens.

"I knew it! It's the Mistress, Mishy Terrine! She's got that platinum blonde hair and that strong willed personality and her name is 'Flynn.' She's Mistress Flynn from the Plainsmen!"

"Oh! The Mistress!"

"The Mistress! The Mistress!"

"Whaaaat?"

Now it was our turn to be the odd men out. Commander Mountain Range's group is chanting 'Mistress' over and over again.

There's 'How I've missed the young Mistress's smile' and 'Without the Mistress, I'd never have been able to graduate from the Plainsmen' and 'I still treasure the handkerchief the Mistress wrapped around my broken arm' and 'It didn't really do much, though' and 'The mud soup the Mistress made me drink after I was exhausted from training and the completely out of this world diarrhea I had the next day... I couldn't forget that even if I tried!'

"Can you make it clear as to whether you like me or hate me?"

They all continue to list the good and bad of the young Flynn. I waited for a good moment and then turned to the old man with the goatee.

"Are all the prisoners graduates from the Plainsmen training?"

"That's right. I am too, of course."

"So that means all of them are former soldiers, right? Why did they become murderers? Even preschoolers know that killing someone is the worst crime!"

"What are you saying? We haven't harmed a single person outside of a battle or a bar."

"Then why are you in a prisoner transport and chained up?"

"Because we lost," said Commander Mountain Range gravely as he petted Terrine with a circular motion. And then he immediately went back to being the weird guy who talks to skulls. The X scar on his head looks sad. His subordinates were still recounting their memories of Flynn and the Plainsmen and were getting themselves excited.

T-Zou began to growl lowly. The group she'd identified as enemies was getting energetic. In order to make herself seem as large as possible, her fur was standing on end. With her fighting spirit so out in the open, the day she sheds her clothing as a sheep probably isn't very far off. But from my point of view, the noisier they get, the more it just sounds like bravado.

They don't really have any fighting spirit left, but since they're all in a group, they can just barely make themselves seem energetic... I can't help but think that.

"We all lost to Shimaron. We fought with all our might, but in the end we couldn't beat their numbers. Then we spent eight painful years on Nema Via Island in an internment camp and we're finally being transferred to the northern cape of the continent."

Goatee stretches and the joints in his shoulders, back and neck pop.

"I've heard the cape is good for older people. They say it's not as cold in the north and the labor isn't as harsh. The land near the mouth of the Longalbalu river is fertile so they can grow crops at their leisure. For soldiers who have lost and are no longer able to fight, it just might be heaven."

"Missy Terrine wants to live in the cape too, wight? Of course, Commander does too~"

"... So when you say that you all killed two thousand people, they all died in war?"

These people wearing pink clothes have all been in the middle of a real battlefield. And it's not some battlefield from my grandfather's time, it was just a few years ago. They fought because they were ordered to and they didn't want to die and lives were lost one after another right before their eyes. How many of

them were friends? How many of them were enemy soldiers? And exactly how old were the people whose lives they had to take, no, they had to kill? The lives of their fellow humans.

I'm starting to feel ill just thinking about it and I chase the images out of my mind. I'm not going to watch some cruel documentary. If I didn't know about this, I wouldn't have had to imagine it.

"... Shibuya."

"Ah, what?"

"You look like you're about to puke. Let's go outside and get some air."

"Yeah... but wait, Flynn! What do we do about Flynn!? Even though she's a widow she's still young and we can't leave her alone here with these men."

Thinking about Flynn Gilbit, the discomfort in my stomach is eased a bit. I wonder why? She's dragged us into horrible situations and is going to use us as bait to make a deal with Big Shimaron.

"Hey Flynn, you're done with the bathroom right? I'm sure you have lots to talk about, but that can wait until tomorrow. It's cold, but we'll pass the time in our sleeping bags somehow."

That might have been on her mind as well because she gave a short and generic farewell and started towards the exit.

"No, the Mistress can't spend the night in the cold!"

"That's right! Please stay in the room, Mistress."

"Stay with us, please."

"Uh..."

Flynn Gilbit fell silent and, quite unlike her, let her gaze wander about. She's not an indecisive woman, but maybe she's reluctant to leave the warm room and is letting her hesitation show.

"You guys..." I grab her arm and drag her to the exit. I'm facing the open door so even I don't know who I'm addressing. "You guys being ex-classmates with the Mistress is kinda cool and seems like something that would pop up in a book.

But even so, now she's someone's wife and you're prisoners. It's not going to be like Beauty and the Beast in here! I can't just say 'Okay, goodbye' and leave a young woman in this room filled with a bunch of guys."

"What does a stranger like you know?"

"The Mistress is our lover in our hearts. We don't want some brat butting in!"

"You know what?"

The sheep with the manly spirit bared her front teeth in place of fangs. Even a wimp can have courage and even an unpopular guy can man up. Blood rushed through my veins and my face suddenly heated up.

"Saying she's your lover in your hearts is just going to bother her. If that's in a motherly way, then I'd be able to let it pass. How are you all going to prove that you can keep your heart's love to a certain level!?"

Silence fell for a few moments.

"... The fuck? You trying to say that we're gonna lay our hands on the Mistress!?"

"And just what are you to the Mistress!?"

"I'm..."

Norman Gilbit's shiny mask is in the back pocket of my workpants. I should raise that up in place of a medicine case and declare that I'm her acting husband. It's an excuse that everyone would understand. Maybe even Flynn Gilbit herself.[\[5\]](#).

I rest my fingers on my trump card for a moment, but then I quickly give up.

The one who's grasping this thin wrist isn't the man in the silver mask.

"... her travelling companion."

"Oh my," Murata murmured, twisting up his lips. "This is really turning into a fantasy story."

"And you know what, Ms. Flynn, you're at fault here too! Even if you were their Mistress in ancient times, at this age you're letting them spoil you too much! You had this face that looked like if I handed you a mic, smoke would

spew out from the floor around you and you'd start singing!"

"What do you mean 'at this age?' How rude."

The former Plainsmen are grabbing on to her other arm. They might be fairly pure-hearted guys.

"Well, with things like this, we can settle this fairly. Those who love her will pull on her arms and she'll be the mother of whoever wins! Or something like that."

Murata, I feel like you've gone through that before. Probably on a rerun at 4pm.

"I'll rest outside with these two," Flynn declares as she shakes off the prisoner's hands and moves with us to the exit. I can hear dejected voices going 'aww' behind us. Sorry, but we don't have a choice.

"Is that alright? Bringing you out here like this?"

"You know, Captain, I can't afford to lose you. In order for the deal with Big Shimaron to go through, I can't have you escaping. If I let the two of you sleep unattended and the next day there was no trace of you... Ahh, it'd be so horrible I wouldn't even be able to kill myself!"

Maybe just thinking about it was causing her distress because her shoulders started shaking. We find a spot behind some wooden boxes sheltered from the wind and start sorting through our belongings. The sky is already pretty dark and the stars are shining above our heads.

I consult my digital analog G-shock, my real travelling companion, and see that it's currently 7 o'clock. The 'free plan' boat trip doesn't have a set time for dinner, so I silently bite into the handy snack I bought beforehand at a shop.

T-Zou is politely chewing on some dry feed without any apparent dissatisfaction.

Flynn quickly falls asleep wrapped up in her sleeping bag that's packed with at least five sheep's worth of wool so Murata and I, having nothing better to do, absentmindedly take in the night scenery.

The lights of the ship reflected on the surface of the water are distorted with the swaying.

"Murata."

"Hm?"

Only his head is sticking out of the dirty yellow sleeping bag.

"... Why are we the only ones with a sleeping bag for two?"

"Who knows? Maybe they thought it was better for us to have a slumber party, ehe~."

"This is a little different than having a slumber party... Hey don't go to sleep. I'll get lonely. Hey Murata. Muraken. Tokyo Magic Robinson!" Even calling that name, all he did was start humming 'El Bimbo' for me while half asleep [6].

"Why did you have a smoke bomb on you anyway? Were you the kind of kid who always had a spy kit?"

"I got it from someone."

"From who, where and when? Don't tell me you got it from the Amazon Seatbelts."

"No. I got it at Flynn's house. The first night. It was dark and there were rats. I got it along with a candle. From a tall and cool guy. He said he knew you."

"A tall and cool guy who knows me!?"

Conrad!

I reflexively sit up.

A spark ran through my brain and something indescribable ran up my spine. The weight on my chest lifts and suddenly it's easier to breathe. I feel like I can suck in all the fresh air in the world.

Lord Conrart Weller.

He's alive, he's alive, he's really alive! Thank god, he's really alive. There's no way he'd leave me behind and die.

My eyes and nose start to burn and the sensation crept all the way to my chin. I grab the shoulder of my slumbering friend and shake it with all my might.



"Speak to me, Murata! Tell me everything! Hey, he was a guy that looked like an awesome fencer, right? He was a guy that's ridiculously charming and the girls would all love and, you know, is like a handsome supporting actor in a romance film that you can really relate to, right? Hey, that's right isn't it!? Who did he look like? What famous guy did he look like?"

"Hm, I didn't really get a good look. The candlelight was dim and I'm afraid of

rats and I was nervous and shaky since it was my first night... maybe Bergkamp?"^[7]

I forgot to even comment on that.

"Tell me a baseball player, please."

"... Uhhhh... I gueeeeess then... Kakefu?"

Murata, are you Kunihiro Matsumura?^[8]

But Conrad...

Gazing at the stars above me, I listen to Ken Murata drowsily prattle on with his soccer lingo as he drifts off to sleep.

If that's true, then why aren't you here?

1. ↑ This is an extension of the loooooong (and awesome) joke that Murata was doing when he was being 'Tokyo Magic Robinson' in chapter 3. The Tokyo Comic Show was a comedy/magic act. Here's a vid on Youtube. It's not subbed, but I think it kind of makes the Magic Robinson scene funnier if you know what the dude looks like. OH, and this is the background music that Murata was providing himself with. The German version neglected to mention that he was doing that right before he fell on his face. Chalalalala-uwah! BAM! XD ... Ahem, the show came out a year before Murata and Yuuri were born (this is the reason why Yuuri kept on wondering how old Murata was in that scene). ANYWAY, the only things that they've said so far are 'Tokyo Magic Robinson' and 'Tokyo Comic Romantica' (which was another joke and Flynn wasn't even around when they said that) so yeah, they've got every reason to be completely floored that Flynn said 'Tokyo Comic Show,' especially since all of these words are in English XD
2. ↑ He's talking about this song. The original song is Molly Darling.
3. ↑ Okay, I have to admit, this is the first celebrity related joke in this series that made me laugh. Akiko Wada and Aya Matsuura are both singers. I made their names links to songs they sing. Fun fact: That Aya Matsuura song was released a few months after this book. I was on exchange in high school at the time and I heard that damn song so many times I wanted to gouge my

ears out. Could not go ANYWHERE without hearing it! That yellow/orange poofy dress thing brought back bad memories XD

4. [↑](#) Why yes, Yuuri did just use Luis Biron's '-pon' from novel 4.
5. [↑](#) This is yet another Mito Koumon joke. At the end of just about every episode, he'd raise up his medicine case and declare who he was, after some huge fight, of course. Kind of like Sailor Moon's "I'll punish you" speech.... I can't believe I just compared Mito Koumon and Sailor Moon XD
6. [↑](#) This is the song from the first footnote~ El Bimbo, or 'Oriibu no Kubikazari' in Japanese, is the song Murata was singing in chapter 3 when he was being Tokyo Magic Robinson.
7. [↑](#) Dennis Bergkamp. Soccer player from Amsterdam. Here's his Wikipedia page.
8. [↑](#) Combined footnote! Masayuki Kakefu is a former baseball player for the Hanshin Tigers and is now a commentator. His commentating style has a lot of drawn out syllables. Kunihiro Matsumura is a comedian famous for his impressions and his impression of Kakefu is one of his better known ones. So, since Murata was drawing out his speech, it sounded like he was doing an impression of Kakefu.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7[edit]

Standing before the cloudy, dark green water, I secretly worried.

My eyes are bloodshot from crying last night for the first time in a while and I want to rinse them out. But washing my face with this water would be inviting an eye disease on myself. Come on conjunctivitis with blepharitis. I tried taking off my sunglasses to see if the color would change, but the dark green just turned mossy.

It happened when I had just decided to suck it up and do it.

“Uwah!”

I thought a large leather bag had floated up, but the surface of the river broke and a kappa appeared^[1].

“A kappa!?”

What rose out of the water was a normal human child brushing their wet hair out of their face.

In the warm morning sunlight, he had swum over from the other side of the river that we couldn't even see and, without getting permission from anyone, climbed up on deck. Maybe the crew was used to this sort of thing because they don't say anything to the soaking wet kid.

The legs and arms sticking out of his white shirt and shorts aren't sturdy looking enough to call him a young man. He's barely ten. The boy places the leather bag he'd dragged with him in front of me. It's the same size as he is.

“Greetings.”

He's kind of like a European who has some asian blood... or maybe just the fact that he has single fold eyelids and a small nose makes him seem a bit asian. Of course, his eyes aren't black and he has reddish brown, tight waves.

“I'm David from Copperfield's. I hope you're enjoying your journey.”

"Thank you. Did you swim here all the way from the shore pulling along this bag? That's awesome."

"What is? Me swimming? I'm used to it. It's my job, after all."

"But aren't you cold? It's almost winter."

"I'm fine. I'll dry off. Right away. I'm used to it. Do you need anything? Cigars? Soap? I have everything... sheep food..? Well if a substitute is okay I can dig up something."

He had a perfect business smile and customer service voice.

Flynn had been invited to breakfast by Commander Mountain Range and Murata had been fishing in the river since the morning. After settling our stomachs with some snack food, T-Zou and I had absolutely nothing to do. Even so, doing squats on the deck wasn't very useful for relieving emotional fatigue.

Both my body and heart needed a rest, I knew that, but there have been so many devastating events happening one after another that I can't relax because I'm so tense.

Thinking it might brighten my mood, I peek at David's wares that he's spread out.

"What kind of things do you have? Do you have any souvenirs? Stuff like local food?"

"Of course. How about some Shimaron chestnuts? They're tough and delicious.[\[2\]](#)"

The object he pulled out of his waterproof leather bag wasn't the kind of chestnut I was imagining. It had the appearance of a delicate, round truffle and it had a very nostalgic smell.

"Uwah, ugh it's bitter! This tastes like seirogan!"[\[3\]](#)

I dig around in my workpants's pocket with my right hand looking for some of the Shimaron money I had. Then I remember what happened when we boarded this boat and I ask the merchant, "I only have this, is that alright?"

"Yes, of course. This is Small Shimaron so that's normal. I don't really have

enough change, though.”

“But, if a war starts, won’t you not be able to use this money?”

David flashes me a friendly smile and unfastens his change purse from his waist.

“Since I’m gonna use it for food today and tomorrow and also for restocking my supplies, there’s no way I’d still have any of it left by the time the war starts.”

“You even go to the supplier by yourself? That’s cool; I can’t believe it. You’re still a kid.”

“Not at all.”

The merchant waves a dismissive hand as he smiles.

“Next year I’ll be twelve so I’ll be conscripted and I can send money home to my family. But until then, I have to find customers like this and make some money or my brothers will starve. But today I had some luck. Usually there aren’t any other passengers on a prisoner transport. I really had some good luck today with a nice adult like you onboard.”

“Daaamn, you’re pretty good. I wonder if I should just buy as much as that money can get me. Give me that hairy thing too.”

“Thank you very much. How about this paper cutter? It’s made out of a rare bone.”

A flock of birds passes by overhead. On the surface of the water, there is a cluster of bugs that looks like water striders gliding along.

“The weather has been strange lately,” David said as he wiped the dust off of the goods I just bought. “It’s a strange sky. There must be something like an earthquake coming. The birds are out of season and the fish are being caught in huge droves. It seems like giant squids have appeared in foreign oceans. Why are giant squids that no one’s seen before suddenly coming up from the depths... I really think something’s going on. Something that only the animals can sense. I don’t know if it’s because of that, but the adults in town are starting to tell some scary lies. Like a ghost is haunting the empty house in the forest or graves are robbed right after a funeral...”

"I'm not from around here so I don't know, but is it not normal for the skies to be cloudy this time of the year?"

"It's not just the sky, but the animals too. They're crossing over too much lately. Speaking of too much..."

He adds his anxious thoughts about the room that Flynn's having tea in.

"There's a lot of prisoner transfers too. It wasn't like that before last year."

"Yeah, I hear that they're transferring them to a cape near the mouth of the river up north. They say it's a prison like paradise, good for spending old age in."

"Everyone said the same thing on the last ship and the ship before that. That they're going to the cape. There's a bunch of good fields there for different crops and there's always something growing all year long. But it's weird. Sending the prisoners there is weird. I mean, the prison at the cape was closed down two years ago. It's weird."

David repeated that it was weird again. I had had my own doubts about the story, but it wasn't where we were headed so I hadn't given it much thought. Those guys might have a cruel fate and the jailers and officials lied to them to keep them from knowing. If that's true, then sadly I can't do anything for Commander Mountain Range and everyone.

David from Copperfield's sold me even things I didn't need and left the same way he came. He's gonna swim through the dark green, cloudy water to the far away shore I can't even make out. He's definitely a bit kappa-like. But next year he's going to be twelve. He's going to start the well paid military life. He won't be dragging around the body-sized leather bag as he swims through a cold and dirty river anymore.

He might become one of the people being transferred on this boat.

It's already been half a day since he altered the advance party's trajectory to head towards the Calorian border. The fastest group had already landed in Small

Shimaron. Also, the two units who had quickly gone around the Gilbit harbor town should have started gathering information in the autonomous region of Caloria.

Lord von Voltaire had headed down to the research room from hell in order to tell Greta the news. However, why exactly does he have to keep visiting that place? Since he's in charge of the investigation and is supervising all the soldiers in this state of emergency in absence of the king, it's strange that he's constantly going to report all of the insignificant details personally.

Next time, he's going to call them to his office. Gwendal decides this as he pushes open the door.

The soundproofing is perfect as always. As soon as the heavy doors opened, really loud noises drift out.

"Ngaah! That's not fair Anissi-agh!"

It's the scream of a child crushed to death. Thinking she might be committing abuse, he runs into the room, but it was just the descendant of the Wincotts, Lindsey, getting his nose pinched until it turned red.

"What did I tell you to call me?"

"Hah... Lady hon Karhelnikaa... egh."

"That's right. Calling an older person by their first name on the very first day you meet them is just incredibly rude." That's the number one villainess who pops up in children's dreams for you (according to the Great Demon Kingdom's research). She won't show any lenience even when concerning what a child calls her.

Lindsey squats down on the floor after being released and wipes away his tears with his hand. Before he knew it, Gwendal was thinking to himself 'that's a good boy' as he clenched his fist.

Greta had Okiku Günter in her lap and is discussing something quietly with him.

As he was flooded with ridiculous uncle-like feelings, his eyes met with Okiku.

Having gotten over crying in bed and trying to run away from home, the light in

his eyes is strangely different.

“Gwen! Did you find Yuuri!?”

“No.”

The doll spoke to Greta as she was about to fall into despair. The moving parts of its chin and eyelids made clacking noises.

“It’s alright, Greta. Our kingdom’s superior soldiers will definitely find His Majesty.”

“I know...”

Lady Anissina von Karbelnikoff, in the midst of putting an ancient teaching method into practice, is bending over and looking down upon the exhausted child with his legs sprawled out across the floor. What is that wooden puppet standing up next to them!? Gwendal, concerned about his childhood friend’s well-being, assumes a posture like he’s about to kick it down.

The large man with the almost transparent white skin (completely naked) is Snow Günter being controlled by the Wincott poison. The soul has been taken out... but even so, he’s still alive... when he moves around in that condition, it’s a huge change compared to his super beauty from when he was properly alive.

The shine in his hair is gone, his skin seems unhealthy, his eyes are cloudy, his jaw is loose and out of position and his cheeks are gaunt. Also, his stomach, buttocks and crotch are all flat and as he stands by the petite Anissina, he just looks like an incompetent giant whose only merit is his height.

He was much lovelier when he was packed in with the snow. Since he’s in the process of becoming a zombie, wishing he was lovely might be a bit awful.

“Okay, Lindsey. What shall we play next?”

The Mad Magician, Lindsey von Wincott and Snow Günter – two people and one body – have spent half the day trying every single game imaginable. The games Lindsey wanted to play were hide-and-seek, Poison Lady Tag, the Super Magic-Powered Yoyo, magical comics, and Mr. Pocket Monster Demon. Anissina’s suggestions were Grudge Demon (the object of the game was the independence of the wife), smashing demon building blocks (the object of the

game was the independence of the daughter), demon forest soccer, dancing for scary dead people spirits and so on. The list is endless.

“It’s your turn to decide. Go on and say what game you want to use Snow Günter for.”

The descendant of the Wincotts sits down hard on the floor and flung his arms and legs out and gazed at the ceiling.

“I’m bored of this!”

“What did you say? Are you sure?”

Okiku Günter’s eyes snap open. A beam burns off a part of the curtains.

“Yeah. I’m bored of Snow Günter. I don’t need him anymore. I’ll give him away.”

Children are cruel.

“Wahohohohohohohoho!”

Letting loose a voice like a happy dog running around in the garden, Okiku rolls around on the floor. The red, killer beams fly around wildly and the nursemaid holding the child screams. Eventually, with a weird sound like a suction pad being ripped off, the soul comes out of its mouth. It wanders around near the ceiling before popping into the stock still Snow Günter.

“... Günter?” asked Greta timidly.

The color in Snow Günter’s cheeks is gradually returning and his back is straightening out. His heart starts beating again and blood is moving through the veins in his body and his chest is starting to function again.

“A great success,” Anissina gloats.

Gwendal is relieved that the small and cute Greta and Lindsey weren’t brought to any harm.

However, the revived Lord Günter von Christ has been joyously reborn. He’s gained new abilities and grown emotionally and has been upgraded to Real Günter. He can no longer be compared to Previous Günter. His current passion and attitude towards carrying out his duties make it as if he’s a completely

different person.

The ‘Let’s get to work!’ spirit is forming an aura oozing out of his entire body.

“Now ‘at I’m back, iz all righ’. Leave ery’ing ‘o me.”

But, his jaw is still out of alignment.

“Righ’, less star’ wit the piled up wor-achoo!”

And he’s showing off while completely naked.

His body just won’t get used to civilized living after such a long time.

“... These clothes are somewhat prickly. But I only spent a little time naked... at this rate, His Majesty will come to hate me. His Majesty likes me better when I wear clothes.”

‘You tried otherwise!?’ was what only one person retorted in their mind.

His speech patterns have completely returned to normal. Lady von Karbelnikoff, knowing nothing of restraint or going easy, had reinserted his jaw bone. Completely dressed, Lord von Christ returned to the headquarters of Blood Pledge Castle for the first time in ten days. He starts spouting off little words of wonder.

“Ah... my office I haven’t been at for a while, the castle air I haven’t breathed in a while... achooachooachooachoo ACHOO! The dust-achoo! Damn it all!”

Or not.

“It’s not that it’s sad that His Majesty isn’t here, it’s sad that I can’t be by His Majesty’s side. Ah, Your Majesty... I offer up the 72nd song of praise of Your Majesty... His Majesty that loves winter, the something something person~”

He’s horribly messing up the lyrics.

Gwendal clicked his tongue. Where did all that determination from before go? With him like this, becoming Real Günter won’t change anything, will it? Greta, who had been sticking her head out the door, quickly drew her head back in.

“Someone’s coming! They’re carrying something huge.”

“Your Excellency! I am reporting without delay!”

“What happened?”

It seems that the guard knows which one of them is safer to receive their orders from. The guard who had run up out of breath kneels in front of Gwendal and showed him his back. What he was carrying was a limp model skeleton on the verge of death.

It was an Ubasuteyama with an uneasy conscience^[4].

This was the first time the heir of the von Wincotts, Lindsey, had seen one of the tribe so he was really excited.

“Please excuse my rudeness. He... this flying skeleton has passed its limits with its continued mind connection and has exhausted itself into immobility.”

“That’s fine. Just tell me the facts.”

“Frankly, one of the members of the tribe... Um, I can’t really understand it well. It said it received words from His Majesty.”

“Words? Did it meet him directly?”

“It seems so.”

“And just what was it told?”

The soldier tilted his head to the side and turned his face to his back and the skeleton made a noise like air being let out.

“He said ‘evenin.’”

That’s a greeting, probably. Lord von Voltaire sits at the desk he’s become accustomed to and waves his right hand for the soldier to continue his report.

“Okay, I’ll translate... member, of tribe, His Majesty, saw. Travelling, he was, river, by boat.”

“Not the direct translation. Please translate it liberally.”

“Yes sir. My father’s father’s father, a relative of a far lineage, departed on a journey on a flowing river. He partook of alcohol with a comrade and exchanged

the stories of their lives. The river divides the land and flows to the vast ocean.”

The Flying Skeleton Tribe is quite poetic. All present in the room make this new discovery.

“This fortuitous meeting in a strange land was heard on the tidings of the wind by a friend. Those beautiful black eyes gazed fondly upon our ghastly visage.”

“Get to the point! Stop this prose. Well, the prose is wonderful, but shorten it for now.”

“Yes sir! It seems that he had contact with His Majesty on the Longalbalu River heading north in Small Shimaron. While it was dark, he sent a telepathic message to the nearest buried Earth Skeleton tribe and that one rose from its grave and walked a far distance to the next buried Earth Skeleton tribe and then next to a fallen Flying Skeleton tribe and the message was carried along like that.”

“They do like to be buried,” said Anissina after being silent the whole time. She’s gazing greedily at the bones. That’s dangerous.

“Going north on the Longalbalu River... that means... the cape?”

“It’s heading towards the prison at the cape. It seems to be a prisoner transport.”

“Prisoner transport!? Why is he riding on that boat?”

Saying that he doesn’t know, the soldier falls silent. Sometimes the behavior of King Yuuri was completely unpredictable.

“Wh-what should we do!? Prisoners! If something happens to His Majesty’s body... Ah! His Beautiful Majesty! It’s like throwing a little sheep into a pack of beasts!”

Not having any way of knowing what the sheep was really getting up to, Günter works himself into a panic.

“The fact that you are worried about something like that is strange. If you throw a man into a group of men, all you have to worry about is his personality getting worse,” Anissina stated.

Gwendal had started planning on who to order where in his head. Going himself would be the best, but he wasn’t sure if it was a good idea to leave the

capitol to Günter. Besides, the detention facility at the cape was closed two years ago. If the prisoners aren't being transported for imprisonment, then why are they being moved en masse?

Where was Lord von Bielefeldt's current location? Since he just up and left the castle, he hadn't been able to tell him the card relay points. He's probably with Gisela, so maybe he should rely on her judgment.

At any rate, if Wolfram could head that way...

Greta let out an unbelievable shriek. She's not the sort of child to cry and scream over something silly. Even the startled flying skeleton flaps its tired wings.

Two guards come carrying a man, half supported and half dragged. At first, neither Gwendal nor Günter knew who it was. The man was unable to lift his head, so he forces his words out while gazing at the floor.

"... Your Excellency... I apologize... for coming... without permission..."

He desperately tries to lift his face. His left eye is closed up with inflamed skin and there are negligently treated burns on his cheek and nose. His grey hair and beard that had turned near-white is just barely covering half of his face.

"Hube!"

Calling his name for the first time in months, Greta runs towards the man.

Lord Gegenhuber Grisela escaped the grasp of the two guards and fell prostrate on the cold floor.

- ↑ A kappa is a creature that lives in rivers and ponds. This is pasted from my AshitaMa footnote about them: A kappa is a water monster. The most popular version being a turtle creature with a little bowl-like spot on the top of their head that needs to stay filled with water or they lose all their power. They're said to do stuff ranging from little pranks to straight up drowning

people in the river.

2. ↑ There was a mini-joke in here~ One of the ways to say ‘chestnut’ in Japanese is ‘maron’ so the kid said “How about some Shimaron maron?” People usually just say ‘kuri’ for chestnut.
3. ↑ Seirogan are beechwood extract pills used to treat diarrhea.
4. ↑ Ubasuteyama is basically a mountain where old women were abandoned during a time of famine. There’s a story of a son who carried his mother on his back to this mountain and on the way, she was breaking twigs and dropping them so that her son could safely find his way back after he abandoned her there. It’s a lot more touching than my quick summary, though.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8[edit]

Without saying a word, Gwendal walked toward his cowering relative^[1].

Lord Gegenhuber Grisela is his cousin in law on his father's side. In the past, there were similarities in their outward appearances and their relatives told them they looked alike at every opportunity.

However, now that Gegenhuber seems to have suddenly aged a hundred years, there are hardly any traces left that they are blood relatives. Looking down on the thin body on the floor, he lifts his right leg up and kicks him.

Everyone draws in a breath and Greta lets out a piercing scream. The man crumples down with a low moan.

"Gwen, why!?"

"Move!"

Gegenhuber tries to push himself back up with his elbows, but before he can, he's kicked down again and he awkwardly writhes about on the cold floor. By the time he's kicked in the stomach the fourth time, the man is completely incapable of putting up any resistance.

"Do you know what you have done!? How dare you come groveling here!"

Placing a hand on his trembling shoulder, Greta desperately tries to get him to sit up.

"Why, Gwen? Why would you do something so mean... Hube's going to die!"

"Yes, he will die like this," Anissina says as she places a hand on the girl's shoulder. "Step away. I won't let him die yet."

With a monstrous strength completely unimaginable looking at her dainty figure, she grabs Gegenhuber by the collar and lifts him up. The tips of the tall man's toes leave the floor and hover in the air.

"Now listen, Lord Grisela. I despise you. Live in shame for the rest of your life

that you had to be saved by me."

He's roughly thrown away with a thud, but his complexion had already gotten a bit better. It was from the magic technique of one of the Three Great Witches. He's not exactly healthy, but he can probably just manage to support his own body weight.

"You're shameless! If you value your life, get out of here!" yelled Gwendal.

"... I don't... value my life..."

"Then I'll kill you!"

One of the guards frantically stops Gwendal as he lays a hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Your Excellency! Lord Grisela is still ill. He's only been conscious for a few days so he may not be thinking clearly!"

"This is the man who tried to destroy the kingdom while thinking clearly! This is the man who tried to kill Conrart, Lord Weller twice! And what's more, this joke of a demon turned his blade against his king!"

It was rare for Lord von Voltaire to show so much emotion like this. With his rage and his shame for being related to this man, the fingers gripping the hilt of his sword are turning white.

"... You traitor," he spat out with a cold voice that seemed to reverberate all the way to the depths of the earth.

Still clutching to his nursemaid's waist, Lord Lindsey von Wincott said apathetically:

"I know this man. My father said many times that he drove my aunt to her death."

"Hube, did you really do something that horrible..?"

Gegenhuber pushes the girl away and he forces out some more words as he holds himself up with both hands on the floor.

"I am fully prepared to be beheaded here... my survival depends on the compassion of Your Excellency... However, I have just, just one thing I must

report! Please let me meet with Her Majesty Cecilie! I have something I must tell her..."[\[2\]](#)

"Her Majesty the previous king is not in the kingdom. She is currently visiting various countries at random."

The man who had been unconscious ever since he'd been brought in from a foreign country murmured dumbfounded.

"The previous king..?"

"Hube, the king of The Great Demon Kingdom is Yuuri. He's got black hair and black eyes. He's my father now."

Not quite understanding, the man mulls over this for a little while before abruptly raising his head.

"... You don't mean... that person at the resort town who was with ... then I have pointed my sword at the present Demon King... what have I done..." Günter is the only one who reacts to that place name and asks "Why such a place?" in a troubled voice.

Gwendal takes a dagger from the waist of the guard and throws it, scabbard and all, in front of Gegenhuber. The sound of the metal hitting stone makes the dry air tremble.

"Do you intend to continue to disgrace yourself?"

"... Your Excellency, I..."

"I begrudgingly let you keep your worthless life with the expectation that you would never again appear before us. How dare you not recognize that?" "I did not know that person was His Majesty in Hildyard... I swear it! I just thought that if that person was in danger, Lord Weller would try to cut me down in earnest. It didn't even occur to me that Her Majesty Cecilie could have retired... I am prepared to take responsibility. I won't do anything else unsightly. However, before that, please let me meet with the new king. No, if that will not be granted to due to my lowliness, I have something I must tell you all and have you understand! It is of great importance, a horrible truth that puts the very existence of the kingdom at stake."

"Your words are not worth listening to. Someone! Take this man to the northern quarry or somewhere. Do not give him a drop of water until he repents and takes his own life."

Thrusting herself in between them, Greta attempts to head off his anger.

"Stop! Stop it, Gwen! Listen to what Hube has to say!"

"That man turned his blade against Yuuri. He's not worthy of being protected by you."

"I did too!"

Gegenhuber lifted his head. His unsightly sealed left eye is exposed in the light of the room.

"I tried to kill Yuuri too! I lied and tried to stab him for my own selfish reasons... Even now... even now when I remember it I cry... it hurts and I'm so ashamed I want to disappear. I feel sorry and knowing how horrible what I did was makes me want to run far away. But I feel the worst when I'm ashamed."

She has manly eyebrows and long eyelashes, but her eyes are glistening with tears and she spreads her arms as wide as she can. Her reddish brown, unbound hair is in tight waves and is touching her shoulders.

"... It's shameful. I mean, Yuuri's such a good person. I really love Yuuri. But I did that... the more I love him, the more I'm ashamed... I think to myself, I tried to kill this person... just because I wanted my life to be easier, I tried to kill this person who I came to love so much. I'm so ashamed... I want to disappear."

"Greta."

She bit her lip and took a moment to attempt to resist her emotions. But she immediately loses her control and continues on in a tearful voice.

"But Yuuri doesn't get angry. He's never said that I was bad. He would never ever say that he hated me. He says he loves me and that I'm cute and ka... kawaii! I almost cry when he tells me these things, but I hold back. Even though I'm so completely ashamed, I hold back because everything is good now. I don't want to ruin the time I have with Yuuri now. I say in my heart 'I'm sorry... I'll never ever do that' so many times and I hold back my shame. Gwen, you and

Wolf say it a lot too, don't you? 'What do you think Yuuri would say if he was here? Do you think he'd say you were bad?' So Gwen! If Yuuri was here, right now, what do you think he would say? Hube did a really bad thing, but if Yuuri was here, what would he say?"^[3] Anissina harshly kicked her childhood friend in the calf. She knows better than anyone that he wouldn't budge unless she did that.

Gwendal staggered and then knelt and gently grasped the girl's shoulders.

"... I'm sorry."



“No.”

Arms thin yet filled with life, along with the heat characteristic of children, wrapped around the adult’s back. “Yuuri would hug me tighter.”

The reborn Lord Günter von Christ sniffed discreetly so no one would notice. He pretends to be oblivious as he walks past everyone and stands in front of

Gegenhuber.

“Even if others say they do not want to listen...”

The man’s right eye looked up at the beautiful royal advisor.

“I will listen to you. Even if everyone becomes disgusted and leaves the room. Assuming that this is in fact for the sake of the king and the kingdom and for the sake of us demons.”

Yes, my place of work is here.

There is no one else besides me who can support the king by serving at his side for the sake of the kingdom, the demons and even for myself.

I believe you know that I continued to search for the Demon Flute without returning to the kingdom by the order of His Excellency Gwendal. The result is that I discovered a piece of the Demon Flute in Svelera, buried one piece in a grave in place of the corpse of an infant and another I entrusted to an acquaintance I met on my travels.

However, I was in no way satisfied with the fact that the Demon Flute was in an esoteric stone excavation site. Why should the pride of the demons not only be in the middle of a rock formation full of esoteric stones, but also stored deep within it? I’d think that the esoteric stones that aid the human’s techniques would not be compatible with the Demon Flute that is said to be the embodiment of magic itself.

If you think that it passed through the hands of blasphemous fellows buying and selling treasures, it’s strange that it was deep within such a place. It would be appropriate to assume that it was in the treasure vault of a collector.

On the contrary, if it was in that place ever since some unknown person took it out of the kingdom two hundred years ago, it’s possible that someone intentionally hid it in that rock in Svelera for an important purpose. I was consumed by such thoughts and wandered in search of the reason. At that time,

the kingdom of Svelera had put much effort into the procurement of their esoteric stones for the betterment of the kingdom and many of the unemployed citizens began to work in the mines. I'd even heard that the raw ore of superior quality had a mysterious nature and could only be handled by women and children.

That was another strange thing.

For magic stones that possess supernatural power in the same way, there is no such characteristic. I have... held a magic stone before, but neither the stone's power nor its effectiveness fell.

Anyway, it is no exaggeration that there was something abnormal with the mining of esoteric stones in Svelera. No matter how little rain fell or if the drinking water dried up, at the bare minimum they had to raise the crops for the next year's seeds. However, the king of Svelera did not protect the farmland or the farmers and continued to do nothing but dig up esoteric stones. If he wanted to dig, he should have at least dug a well. It was as if the finances for the next year were in some way guaranteed.

It took a long time, but I finally discovered their true intent.

They weren't after stones. Although the esoteric stones certainly brought them immense fortune, that was simply a byproduct. Svelera wasn't mining for stones; they were looking for something much more terrible in the places where many esoteric stones were.

Grasping the magic stone that warmed at my chest, I gazed upwards.

The sky above the Longalbalu river was a light grey and completely different than the stone's Lion's Blue. It feels like I haven't seen a clear sky in forever. I wonder if it's the normal weather for this place. The young salesman from Copperfield's had also said it was a strange sky.

"With this slow flow, it seems it will take about three more days to get to the

mouth of the river.”

Flynn, done with her never ending tea party with Commander Mountain Range, quietly sat down next to me. She adjusts the front of her leather jacket. I wonder if it’s a bit too heavy for a girl.

“Those men are unfortunate. They were born in different places, but they were all rounded up for the dispute with Small Shimaron and when the battle ended, they were treated as prisoners from a defeated army.”

“In that situation, isn’t there a way to swap prisoners of war? Weren’t there negotiations to return the Shimaron soldiers captured by the... other country?”

“We did.”

That’s right. Her country, Caloria, was beaten by the same country and forced to become their territory.

“Norman desperately negotiated to get back the soldiers left behind in battle. It was a battle that was completely defensive so the only ones sent into enemy territory were intelligence scouts and there weren’t many of them, but... it was futile. In the end, we were the defeated country and we couldn’t raise an objection against the victor. The prisoners of war from Shimaron in Caloria were all sent back, but the ones who returned here were only a lucky few... I’m sure it was similar for other countries. And even now there are men like them within Shimaron who are enduring outrageous manual labor and treatment.”

Flynn rested her chin on her knees and gazed at the river’s flowing surface. She looks at least five years younger holding her knees sitting here than when she was in the estate covered in extravagant clothing.

“... It’s horrible, war. I hate it.”

“I do too.”

Since she spent her youth in an organization like the Plainsmen, she is fully knowledgeable of the life of a soldier. She’s definitely far more knowledgeable about how those men will act in an emergency and how they are treated than ladies in other countries who live in castles. Of course, more than me, a Japanese person, as well.

"That's why I'm taking you to Big Shimaron."

Now that she's talking about me, I hurriedly turn away from watching the shadows of the fish in the river. At the stern of the boat, Murata is struggling with his fishing rod and is yelling "I got a big one!"

"I promised I would explain properly, didn't I? I'll tell you everything, no lies. Once you hear it, you may think it's a joke. Or, you may even approve of it. But whichever way it turns out, I can't just keep leading you around without telling you the reason. If I did, I'd end up just like Lord Saralegi... I don't want to be like him."

I'd heard the name 'Saralegi' before. He's the king of Small Shimaron. The large text in the two page ad says he's very much not like an idol. Like, he sleeps with both eyes open?

"Although Caloria is autonomous, it is a territory of Small Shimaron. If they are going to fight with the demons, then we have no choice but to abide by that. They'll take our goods and fortune and, most importantly, they'll steal all of our young lives... I don't know why you're away from your country, but you were born amongst the demons, right Captain? The Wincotts are one of the founding families of the nation, after all. What about your country's soldiers? Are they also enlisted at 12?"

"No way!"

Since Wolfram, at the age of 82, looks the same age as I do, I can't even imagine what a pure demon at the age of 12 would even look like. I've heard that they decide their lives at 16, so I'm sure they're allowed to be children until that point.

"Yes, the swords are too heavy for them to even lift at age 12. But 12 year old boys are disappearing from Caloria... and from the port town of Gilbit as well. In order for them to become splendid Shimaron soldiers, they're called together every year. I didn't want to see that anymore. I also hated that the children who were already taken would be sacrificed after the war started. It's probably a sentiment that a military man wouldn't understand. It's okay if you call me effeminate."

"... I think so too. I'm always saying that we can't have people dying in war. I'll

say it as much as I need... Right now, you're calling me a captain, but in reality... in reality..."

I'm the Demon King. But I can't say that. I'm not really someone called Captain Crusoe. I'm not really a descendant of the Wincotts!

"A secret messenger from Big Shimaron came with a proposition. The Wincott poison is supposed to be in the recesses of the Gilbit Estate. They wanted that terribly. Furthermore, they were in a great hurry. It is the only substance in the world that will let one control another at will. If a body is afflicted by that poison, it will become a puppet of the descendants of the Wincotts. Whether it's alive or not. I gave them that poison. In exchange for the lives of the Calorian soldiers."

"Their lives? What sort of deal was it?"

"Big Shimaron negotiated with Small Shimaron and reduced the military allotment of my country. Of course, the fact that a secret agreement took place was not brought to light and it was supposedly to deal with the lack of workers loading and unloading cargo at the harbor which they have joint ownership of. The child soldiers returning to us are, in reality, very few, but those children were freed. Soon, the second group will come back. They no longer have to go to battle."

Flynn smiled a heartfelt smile that looked almost motherly. It's indicative of the fact that she had thoroughly thought out how she was going to raise her children even though she didn't have any with Norman.

Murata fishes up a boot.

"But then why did the bigger Shimaron want the Wincott Poison? Why did they want something like that? What could they want to do by turning someone into a puppet... Oh hey, it looks like we changed directions."

At the end of the ship, there's an apparatus for setting the ship's orientation that the helmsman operates. Two of the boards that look like a huge fish's tail and fins are lined up parallel. They're gradually changing their angle and the current at the bow has begun flowing diagonally. It's slowly slanting to the left. Maybe it's going to head near the western bank.

"They might be getting some more cargo. They have a great number of boxes

like that."

The nearly cubical, wooden containers are cramped together on the deck. At night they block the wind and during the day, they provide shade against the sun.

"... Big Shimaron also got their hands on a 'box.'"

It might have been the wind running across the surface of the river, but she shivered.

"If that box is opened, an immense power sealed long ago will be awakened... It is said that there are four things in this world that must not be touched... Big Shimaron has gotten their hands on one of them. If it is released with the proper key, that power will bow to the master and those he deems worthy and it can become a virtuous or an evil weapon. The secret messenger from Big Shimaron said this: They've already found the key. Now all they need is to use the Wincott Poison and manipulate the key to their will."

"The proper key that will open the lid is a person!?"

"They didn't say it was a human. But, they also didn't say it was a demon. The messenger stayed in Caloria for a while and I heard from him that they had used the Wincott Poison somewhere. I don't know how they did it, but he said that they had successfully made the one who was the key into their puppet. However, that is something that I and my country should not pry into. I'm only fighting for as many of Caloria's children as possible to not have to go to battle. That's when you, Captain Crusoe, appeared."

"... With the magic stone that had the insignia of the Wincott family?"

"That's right."

It might be because the topic of conversation had gotten too intense, but I had the completely unrelated thought that she had gotten pretty tan in the sun. She'd spent years with that mask on and spent her daily life without ever leaving the estate. Her forehead and cheeks that were so white they were almost transparent are now sunburnt and red.

"I thought greedily. They said that Big Shimaron had succeeded in inserting the Wincott Poison into the person who was the key. Then they would need

someone to manipulate that person who had become a puppet. And if so, maybe they would shoulder the rest of Caloria's military allotment."

"Your country's soldiers will all come home happily, huh?"

"Yes, yes that's right. So that's why I'm..."

That's why you're trying to send me to the Shimaron mainland. It's to save as many of your young people as you can.

She's mistaken me for an actual descendant of the Wincotts and is trying to send me there.

"Flynn, I'm actually-

"During the warring states period in Japan..."

I couldn't hear any footsteps so I didn't notice him. Ken 'Robinson' Murata is holding his fishing haul, the boot, and is gazing towards the west shore as he stands right next to us. With those non-prescription contacts, I wonder how the far away scenery looks.

"... it seems they also dipped their arrowheads in poison."

... huh?

"Murata, what did you just say?"

"I can see it, the next stop. Ah, it's really bad without my glasses. Rather than cargo, it looks like there's a bunch of armed soldiers." My eyes didn't see the scenery on the shore and my ears didn't hear the commotion of the prisoners. The image of Günter getting shot and falling off of the horse and the figure of Conrad disappearing in the explosion from the fire weapons is playing over and over again in my mind. They were the fire weapons that the Big Shimaron soldiers in the Gilbit Estate had.

Poison on arrowheads. The Big Shimaron soldiers did that. In order to fight the demons with a dangerous box weapon that must not be touched. In order to control the stubborn key that would not bow to anyone.

From the very beginning, the target wasn't me, the Demon King.

The name of the box is 'The End of the Wind.' It is said to bring betrayal, death

and despair to the world.

Yes, they were looking for a box.

Naturally, the king of Svelera did not know the significance of the box nor the power it had.

However, for those that are attempting to gain authority, it seems that the box is a source of immense power. For those that are attempting to gain riches, the box can become a great treasure. While Svelera was digging for esoteric stones, they finally dug that up. Deep, deep within the rock formation, where only emaciated women and children can reach, in a place like a labyrinth.

And near that place, the treasure of the demons, the Demon Flute, was sealed. As soon as they discovered the box and brought it out of the esoteric stone pit, I had my acquaintance inconspicuously sneak down there and secure the Demon Flute. The power slowly leaking out of the box over hundreds of years may have slowly changed the surrounding bedrock into esoteric stone. Or, the part of the earth fighting against the power of the Demon Flute may have resulted in its quality being changed. At any rate, once the two objects were removed, for some reason esoteric stones completely stopped appearing and the Sveleran citizens lost their jobs.

There are four objects in this world that must absolutely not be touched. The humans do not even try to know just what sort of mechanisms are built into the box to seal that unknown power or the intentions of the ancestors and how ghastly their history is. Among the demons, all children know of that horrible evil...

As someone who knew of that danger, as soon as I learned that the box had been brought to the royal castle I met with the king to persuade him one way or the other to return the box to its original place. However... did you know? Did you know what the key is for the box buried at the bottom of the earth? Each

box has its own key. Each of the four boxes has its own proper key and if you attempt to forcibly open the box with a false key, an uncontrollable atrocity will occur. The Sveleran royal family eventually tested this with the left eyeball of a certain bloodline of a certain species.

... That is where I received this wound. It seems that my left eye, while similar, was not in and of itself a ‘key.’ Considering that a calamity could have come rushing out when they unthinkingly opened the lid there, I’m actually grateful that the result was only this minor wound.

While I was spending my days regretting my own worthlessness in prison, I met that girl over there. I entrusted the insignia to her so that she would be able to return to the kingdom. If it was the previous king’s regent, His Excellency Stuffel, I’d hoped that he’d seize the insignia and send someone to investigate, but... it seems Greta has held on to the insignia for me till this day... However, I also couldn’t trouble the country by bringing unreliable information after I had been driven out.

I survived and searched for the box after I escaped Svelera.

Since Svelera did not have the key – the left eyeball of a certain bloodline – and could not open the lid, they sold it to a large country. The middleman was Luis Biron and I gained that man’s trust and began to tactlessly search around, but... the only important information I was able to find out was that the box was sold to Small Shimaron.

The name of the box is ‘The End of the Land.’ It is said to bring betrayal, death and despair to the world^[4].

“What did you say!?”

Having listened up to that point, Lord von Voltaire’s boiling anger was replaced by surprise. His clenched fists slowly cooled.

“The box Shimaron got a hold of isn’t ‘The End of the Wind!?’”

“No, I definitely heard... ‘End of the Land’...”

Günter finally stood up from his sadness over the absence of the king.

"Please calm yourself, Gwendal. Shimaron is divided into Big and Small. That being said, they definitely do not have an amicable relationship. If one of them got their hands on 'The End of the Wind,' the other would definitely feel pressured. It's not unsurprising that they would then get their hands on 'The End of the Land.'"

Even though he's trying to calm the other man with his words, his own face is pale with tension. His still wet hair is falling over his shoulder and lying on his chest.

"That means that two out of four boxes have made their way into the hands of humans."

"There are four boxes?" Greta asked innocently. No one answered and silence fell in the room. Eventually, the impatient Anissina explains to the child.

"Yes, there are four objects in this world that must not be touched. If you open the lid, an atrocious power and an evil being will be released and the mountains, rivers, land, people and cows will be mowed down and destroyed. It is something that was sealed thousands of years ago before we became demons. It seems that the humans believe that they can control it, but it's not something that can be controlled."

"Destroyed as in die!?"

"In most cases, yes."

"Poison Lady Anissina is in the box!"

The Wincott descendant, Lindsey, started crying. Anissina simply commented "If I could do something with my power," and bit her lip. Information on the other two is limited. If the humans abuse that power until then, not only will The Great Demon Kingdom's existence be short-lived, but the majority of the planet as well.

"This is unacceptable! Why did you not report something so important to someone with ties to the king!? Even if you were not allowed to return, there were countless other ways to do so," Gwendal yelled.

"Your Excellency... but I reported the bare minimum of the information. Since I was not accompanied by even the Flying Skeleton Tribe on my journey, I had to rely on commercial messengers."

"Like from 'Fly Fly White Pigeon?' I haven't received a single letter from you."

"Like I said... I sent them to Lord Stuffel von Spitzweg. I hadn't known that Her Majesty Cecilie had retired..."

Very nearly letting 'useless ass' come out of his mouth, Gwendal violently hit the wall. No, he punched it.

"That man... Someone find Stuffel! Drag him here even if you have to put a rope around his neck!"

Sensing the urgency of the situation, the soldiers who had gathered in the hallway take action.

"Gegenhuber, is there anything left you have to say?"

"My... there's something about my left eye..."

"Yes, that was unfortunate. I'll send experienced healers to the Grisela Estate."

His voice was unsympathetic, but that was the best he could do. He wants to end this discussion.

"No, that's not what I meant. Your Excellency... Your Excellency should take care."

"You seem to be implying something."

There's no way he'd just let it go after being told something like that. Gwendal crosses his arms and looks down at his cousin who has yet to stand up.

"Like I said, each box has its own key. The humans know that. Things that are not keys have no effect, but using things that are similar to the key or even the wrong key will bring about something terrible... Your Excellency, please be careful. One of the keys to the four boxes is the left eye of a certain bloodline. And another is—"

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Please wait," said Günter, having more of a reaction than the person being

warned. “Why did they use Lord Grisela to test it... No, that is one of my questions, but... are the other three keys to the boxes body parts from special bloodlines?”

Interrupting the tutor’s questions, the soldier who brought the flying skeleton in yells out.

“May I interrupt!?”

Laying his bleached companion on the floor, he grabs the dry, thin wrist and lifts it. It probably doesn’t have a pulse.

“This flying skeleton’s brother’s wife’s cousin told him that he received a telepathic message from his son!”

The family tree of a flying skeleton is completely unintelligible.

“Translate it. But no poems.”

“Yes sir... ‘Father, I am now in the breast pocket of the king’ ...”

Breast!?

“Bfa!”

Blood shot out of Real Lord Günter von Christ’s nose with an odd noise.

1. ↑ Language note! The word for ‘relative’ here is a word that is used when that relative is someone you have to support and it has the implication that this person is being an encumbrance and a burden to you.
2. ↑ Another language note! Hube uses a really old form of ‘I’ that samurai used to use, ‘soregashi,’ and he actually does speak very much like a samurai. I wanted to point this out because this is the third samurai-like thing with Hube. The first time was him disguised as a komusou, then there was the old-timey way of saying ‘I’m in your debt’ (that Yuuri isn’t sure if he actually said or not), and now soregashi. Samurai Hube!
3. ↑ Greta struggled with the word ‘cute’ in English here so I figured I’d just make it the Japanese word for ‘cute’ (kawaii) to get the same effect.

4.  A language note. Both boxes are 'The End of ____' but the 'ends' are different. The End of the Wind is fairly straightforward. The wind stops blowing, no more wind anywhere. The End of the Land, however, doesn't mean that there isn't going to be any more land left like the box is going to destroy it all if it opens. The 'end' used here means the limit or boundary. As in, you were walking and all of a sudden there's a huge cliff and you can't go anymore. That sort of end. The names are both taken from the wiki page, so I'm not going to change them, but I did want to point the meaning out.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9[edit]

As we near the shore, the speed of the boat decreases and our heading is changed more smoothly. At last, we quite admirably squeeze into the perfect spot in the line of boats.

The helmsman wipes the sweat off his brow in satisfaction and receives generous applause from the crew.

However, I was in a panic about the thought that popped into my head just a few minutes ago. If the ship had come to a sudden stop and pitched forward and we all fell into the river, I definitely wouldn't have noticed. Big Shimaron, with which Flynn had made a deal with, wanted both the box and the key. They had gotten their hands on 'The End of the Wind,' but their vital key might refuse to open the lid. So, they used the Wincott Poison to create a puppet with absolute obedience.

The fire weapons that the Big Shimaron soldiers were supposedly using and the mysterious poison on their arrowheads... and Flynn was looking for a Wincott descendant. Everything was lining up. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense.

The soldiers from Big Shimaron invaded The Great Demon Kingdom through the guidance of a criminal connection inside the kingdom. They attacked because they were after Conrad, Günter or myself, but which one? Which one of us was the key that would open the Pandora's Box that should never be opened because it would invite all sorts of disaster? If it was Günter, he was still in the kingdom. He was probably protected and healed by those who came running afterwards. Then if it was Conrad...

"Shibuya, what's that?" Murata asked standing right next to me. I hurriedly wipe my nose and with feigned ignorance, extract the paperknife from my breast pocket.

"Hm? Ah, yeah, I bought this from a kappa."

"From a kappa? Then it's a cucumber."[\[1\]](#)

"It feels like it might be ivory. In Japan, it'd be a rare and high class item, but here it's cheaper than sheep food."

"Isn't this human bone? Anyway Shibu-Captain Crusoe, your nose is running. Your voice is a little stranger than usual too. You might have caught a cold running around with all this cold wind blowing."

"Geh, really!?"

Like Murata had said while staring into the distance, there was a group of armed soldiers on the shore. There are probably about as many soldiers as there are students in my year at school. There are easily two hundred. They're all in light blue uniforms and their chests and lower legs are wrapped in leather and they have swords at their waists. They seem to be waiting as they smoke cigarettes or draw pictures of rats in the ground and are generally relaxing. Since he's only seen modern day militaries, I wonder what my friend thinks of these RPG fantasy troops.

"That's awesome. Are they doing cosplay? Is there some sort of renaissance fair? The Society for the Preservation of Medieval Times has it rough."

So now they're a preservation society.

But even if they don't have guns or machine guns, long swords are dangerous enough. In Japan, they'd be violating the Firearm and Sword Possession Control Law and if this was in the Chiyoda district, they'd be getting a fine for violating the law against smoking cigarettes while walking. With just over two hundred soldiers, they are plenty enough threat without firearms. The three of us went to the farthest corner and decided to simply wait until the boat departed again with bated breath. The booker who Flynn bought off was talking with a soldier that looked like a commanding officer. Their discussion wrapped up a few minutes later and the small man jumped agilely back into the boat.[\[2\]](#).

"Did he just get a bundle of money?"

"Yes, but it's strange... He said that he wouldn't take Small Shimaron money because he didn't know if he could use it once the war started."

Murata answered Flynn's questioning look with surprising seriousness.

"He probably sold something. Something lively that they wanted."

"Robinson, was there fresh fish on board? Isn't there just that boot you fished up?" I asked.

"... I've got a bad feeling about this. It'd be nice if it were just fish."

Murata wears a dark and severe expression that makes his Laughter Mode that he'd had on until now seem like a lie.

The group of soldiers in light blue, Team Powder Blue, are all going to the same barbershop. The way their beards and hair are cut are all in perfect uniformity. All two hundred of them have close cropped hair on the sides and ponytail; all two hundred of them have trimmed beards connected to their sideburns like a wrestler or a foreigner. Abbreviated: Cropped Ponytail. Abbreviated cutely: Cropped Pony. Definitely not a Cropped Pommy^[3].

If there are a hundred of those Nigel Wise Maxines (who absolutely won't die), the hair must be part of some sort of uniform.

"That beard on the Small Shimaron soldiers is like their national flag. You instantly know who they are no matter what," Flynn explains.

"Ah, yeah. They're definitely not part of some passionate fan club, huh?"

Seven or eight of the soldiers from the shore boarded the boat. I thought maybe it was to strengthen the security, but they open the door to Commander Mountain Range plus the around one hundred prisoners and bring them all outside.

"What's going on!? We're not at the cape yet!"

"We're going to the paradise cape! It's a nonstop voyage!"

"We'll catch colds if we go outside. Mishy Terrine is always naked, you know."

They say you catch colds through your head, but I guess a skull would be cold too.

"Hey, check everyone besides the crew. There might be one hiding amongst the regular passengers."

The armed soldiers start checking the few passengers. I pray that the

Plainsmen or someone hasn't spread around wanted posters of us. However, the soldiers aren't asking names or addresses, but are having everyone show them their palms. Flynn and Murata's are barely glanced at, but...

"You, get off."

"Huh!? Why!?"

For some reason, I'm the only one getting dragged away by my clothes after showing the inspectors my palms. I properly hid my eyes and hair with my sunglasses and pirate-style bandana so it's unlikely I've been exposed as a demon. Flynn steps up to the soldier and starts making a furious objection and Murata chimes in with little affirmative words.

"Hey, Crusoe is my companion. I'll be very troubled if he disembarks here!"

"Look at his fingers. These are prominent sword calluses. Are these the hands of a merchant or scholar? These hands are even different than the farmers with their hoes. He might be using a specialized weapon, but he's definitely a combatant. All combatants of unknown origin and prisoners are to be brought before Lord Saralegi. I'm sorry, but you won't be able to travel with him anymore."

"We don't need an army that just patches things up with an 'I'm sorry!'"

Flynn is slowly turning into an angry aunty. But anyway, combatant? What am I, some underling of an evil organization?

"No, these aren't sword calluses! These are bat calluses. My hands got this way from too much passionate practice-swinging!"

Lately I'd had some doubts about taking the lead so I figured I'd work on my batting skills. The inspector tilts his head suspiciously.

"What's a bat?"

"Um, a stick. You hold it with both hands and you hit stuff with a ping. And there are wooden and metal varieties, by the way."

"You hit people with a club? That's an extremely primitive and cruel weapon!"

"No, I hit balls! Don't go running off with your gruesome imaginations... Hey let go! Listen, listen to what I'm saying-uwah!"

An overhand throw. It might have been because I was resisting by swinging around my arms and legs and even my head, but my captor suddenly released me. My fingertips reach around in vain for something to grab as I'm thrown over the edge of the deck.

"Hey wait a minute! I have to swim in the middle of this cold weath-ugh glug gah!"

I think back fondly of the me who was wondering if this water was okay to wash my face with. Under the rich green water, I desperately doggie paddle for the surface. If I wasn't wearing this ridiculously heavy leather coat I'd be able to swim with a gallant crawl. This isn't funny. I can't be separated from Murata. He doesn't know a thing about this world and there's no one else to protect him. Besides, there's Flynn...

She trusted me and told me everything so I can't just leave her like this.

The boarding plank is put away and the ship is quickly moving away from the shore. With Flynn and Murata onboard. Leaving behind me and the prisoners in an unknown land. The Plainsmen graduates are regretfully parting with their Mistress. However, speaking of the Mistress...

"Flynn, are you serious!?"

"There's no point if I don't have him! I bet my life on him!"

Yelling out what could sound like a love confession to people who don't know the whole story, Flynn rolls up the sleeves of her coat and jumps from the deck. With a huge splash, she falls right in front of me.

"Wh-why did you do something so stup-ugh!"

".... swim."

"Huh? What?"

"I can't swim!"

You didn't even think about that!? I grab Flynn's neck and somehow manage to press her body against mine. If the drowning victim flails about, the person going to save them will get taken out with them. Luckily, she's calm and completely trusts me as a lifesaving device. It's lucky that the flow is gentle. I can

keep my head above water and there's hardly any danger of drinking the-

"How mean! You guys are leaving me behind!"

"Nmo!?"

It's unbelievable. Even Murata jumps off the boat and T-Zou dives in like she's chasing him. Are they lovers? Is it a love triangle? The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals? The people around us are getting increasingly more excited. It seems everyone is a fan of soap operas. I know that Muraken can swim and the sheep looks like it will float so I don't need to worry if they'll make it to shore. The problem is me and Flynn. As I pray 'my feet should be touching bottom, please let them touch bottom,' I desperately try and carry the weight of two people. Just when I was thinking 'Damn it! Why aren't I making any progress!?' someone pulls us with great strength all the way to the shore.

I didn't know whose arms they were, but I immediately knew whose arms they weren't.

It's not Conrad.

I'd lost the proof that he was still alive.

Dripping with dirty water, we walk forward supporting each other. Our savior is also lending a hand so it's easier to walk. Out of breath, I brush off Flynn's hair that's clinging to me.

"Why did you do something so reckless!? Staying in the boat was obviously safer!"

"But Captain Crusoe... you didn't look like you'd be able to come back to the boat! What am I going to do in Big Shimaron alone? I explained clearly, didn't I!?"

"... You had Robinson."

"Honestly! You're really slow on the uptake. Mr. Robinson is useless. You're the one I need. There's no point unless it's Crusoe you-"

"Stop saying Crusoe! I'm not really Crusoe!"

We're knee deep in water. If we turn to our right, the shore is just there.

“... Who are you?” Flynn asks in a small voice, letting her hand drop from where it was pulling at her hair a moment ago.

“Who? Uh...”

“Ah, did we finally get found out?”

The nimble Murata who had swam to shore before we did pulls on my clothes. We both slosh forward onto dry land. My feet and fingers tremble with joy at the feeling of being on ground for the first time in a while. T-Zou, in a gesture of gratitude, rubs her furball of a body against me. She seems excited.

“Nmonmonmonmo.... Nmoshkashteeeeee!”^[4]

It’s a sheep voice overcome with emotion. It’s very seldom heard.

“Nmoshkashteeeeee!” Part 2.

Because his contacts aren’t prescription, my friend is squinting at me.

“What do we do, Shibuya? Should we just spill our guts? Or, if we need another bluff, I’ll think one up for us right away. Leave the bluffing to me. I’m a bluffing thoroughbred. My father’s great-grandfather’s mother’s brother’s wife was a ninja in Iga, ninja ninja.”^[5]

“That means you’re not related by blood, Murata.”

“Your name is ‘Shiboya,’ Captain Crusoe? Robinson’s name is ‘Moorata?’”

We’re interrupted by someone very pointedly clearing their throat.

“Lady and gentleman, are there no words of gratitude for me?”

Our savior has loosely tied back orange hair and has both hands on his hips. He shrugs like a mischievous rabbit.

His name is Josak Gurrier. He’s a joker but he’s talented. He’s rude but you can’t hate him. He’s also half-human half-demon and he’s Conrad’s friend and former subordinate. He helped us out during the whole Morgif uproar, but since then he’s mainly been hiding out in other countries on a bunch of missions and doesn’t really have time to come back home.

“Josak...”

"What's wrong, Young Master, making a disheartened face like that? It's times like these that goat milk does the trick! It'll stimulate you, restore your strength and give you unmatched vigor!"

"Goat's mil-eh!? Yo-yo-you were the woman serving lunch at that shop in Gilbit!?"

"You got it! Josa was sad because you didn't recognize her again and she cried a little."

Sometimes he's excessively passionate about his work and he becomes a woman in body and mind. But, it must be remembered that he does that for work and definitely not as a hobby. Maybe.

"Well it seems I got to see yet another mid-journey, embarrassing display over there."

He's got a husky voice you'd hear on an old jazz record, a thick neck, a splendid stature, and you can see even through his clothes that he's got an admirable outfielder's body. I give him a slap on his arm and feel relieved that nothing about him has changed. The pink clothes he's wearing is the prisoner's outfit, if I'm not mistaken. So that means that this time he was disguised as a prisoner and slipped in here? He's got some serious skills.

"I was surprised when I found you there. I couldn't believe that the Young Master was walking around in really dangerous human territory without a guard. I ended up specially sending out a message to Boss Gwendal via Fly Fly White Pigeon."

"White Pigeon... by the way, what do pigeons sound like?"

"Doguu."

"... doguu..?"

"Anyway," he points with his chin to Flynn who's still in a daze about our names and T-Zou who's in a state of fervent rapture. "I can't take my eyes off you. In the time we've been apart you've gotten yourself a woman and livestock. How are you going to make this up to wittle ol' me? You were just playing around, weren't you!"

Getting teased by such a masculine figure just gives me goose bumps. Not being able to laugh at his joke, I introduce my three companions.

"Murata, Flynn, this is Mr. Josak Gurrier. He's a friend of a friend in The Great Demon Kingdom... ah, well we met in a different country. He's a multi-soldier who'll even dress up like a woman for a mission."

"Hello, Sis! Thanks for before!" Murata says cheerfully.

"Sis... Hey, how do you know him!?"

"He's the guy who gave me the candle and smoke bomb. At Flynn's estate."

"Eh..?"

My vision instantly starts swaying and I'm hit with dizziness. I'm out of the river, but I feel like the ground under my feet has disappeared.

"... It wasn't Conrad?"

"Hm? It was definitely this guy. It was dark, but I remember his voice."

I'm flooded with disappointment and a strange sense of relief.

Somewhere inside me, a part of me whispers. Admit it. Just admit that Lord Weller died. Accept that and cry your heart out. It'll be easier that way. Rather than hanging on to a near non-existent hope, accept the painful truth and let your tears fall to your heart's content. That way you can focus only on you and the people around you to get through the troubles ahead. But...

I spread my palm as wide as I can and cover my face. I squeeze my eyes that got dirty water in them shut and wait for my dizziness to go away.

Can I cry here?

Murata is oblivious to the danger we're in, as usual, and Flynn Gilbit is exhausted body and mind by the succession of unforeseen events she's been assaulted with. That woman who was so bold and confident is now a miserable little soaked mouse. I've got the reliable Josak here now, but he's not going to just understand everything about what's going on instantly. It'll take a long time to explain our situation to him.

I take my hand off of my face one finger at a time. By the time my right hand

came down to my chest, the ache in the back of my eyes and the worrisome dizziness had settled. Like I had my finger on the volume up button, the sounds around me are slowly coming back into focus. Flynn has just started to speak wildly.

“You snuck into my estate!? Ah, that makes you a thief!”

“I didn’t steal any of your brassieres so calm down. As a matter of fact, they wouldn’t fit me. Ah, this is at my own expense,” Josak says in a way that makes it seem like there should be a heart mark at the end of his sentence. He then pulls down his collar and shows her his chest. He’s wearing very elegantly designed underwear... for-for work! They’re for work! But even so, that’s some serious sexual harassment.

“A lot of your friends are perverts, aren’t they?” Flynn asked.

“That’s none of your business. Josak is a little, you know. He’s a special case. Who else are you thinking of?”

“That man Adalbert. And Nigel Wise Maxine, too.”

I can’t really call either of them my friends. But, I felt like there was no one else to suggest.

“Not liking your husband’s friends, that’s very young-wife of you.”

“Hey, Robinson, don’t make jokes that’ll deepen the misunderstanding!”

Ahead of us, the prisoners are being threatened into walking. There are over three hundred of the armed Small Shimaron soldiers, so there’s a bit of a time lag for them to get to us at the end of the line. A soldier nearby draws his sword and comes at us in a group of five.

“Frankly, it’s not like even a gentleman like myself can’t break through about five people. What should I do, Young Master Pacifist? I’ll do whatever you say.”

Even though how much of a gentleman he is has nothing to do with it, Josak is strong. But regrettably, he’s the only fighter we have on our side. The only other one with any battle potential is... I guess the wolf in sheep’s clothing.

I steal a glance at the bank out of the corner of my eye. There are several people who seem to be in command on sturdy horses.

"How are we going to get our hands on those horses..?"

"Yeah, bazashi would be good."^[6]

Murata, not for food.

"Where do they plan on taking us... weren't they going to the cape?" Flynn asks.

Like a well-informed man, Josak denies this.

"No, that place was closed down two years ago. Their destination was different from the start."

What were they planning to do by transferring the prisoners... or rather, the former enemy soldiers turned prisoners of war?

1. ↑ Kappa are said to really like to eat cucumbers. If a family wants to bathe in a river, then they'll toss cucumbers in so the kappa will let them bathe in peace. Incidentally, this is also why cucumber sushi rolls are called kappa rolls or 'kappamaki.'
2. ↑ The Firearm and Sword Possession Control Law basically says that no one is allowed to own firearms or swords barring a scant few exceptions related to hunting, industrial work, ceremonial purposes etc. This law is so strict, it even requires permits be filled to possess a nail gun for construction work.
3. ↑ For those not familiar with the term, Pommy is a nickname for the Pomeranian breed.
4. ↑ I kept this in (kind of) Japanese because it's more of a sound effect than the word. The word being 'moshikashite' or 'possibly.' I also took out the silent vowels to make it more sound effect-y. The original is written 'Nmoshikashiteeeee.' I'm sure you remember this if you've watched the anime XD
5. ↑ Iga was one of the two provinces where ninja training villages first appeared. The other province was Koga. Iga and Koga ninja were the elite

ninja during their time and the rich and powerful hired them. Also, Murata used an old-timey ninja/samurai sentence ending here and is obviously just messing around ^.^

6. ↑ Bazashi is horse sashimi (slices of raw horse meat) and is a delicacy. It's actually also really good. I had it once before when I was staying with a family in Kyushu. Although, to be honest, when I found out what I was eating, I was like o.o! And because I had just said that it was really ridiculously delicious, they gave it all to me. The rest of the meal I was like (T-T) Horsies, why you so delicious?

Chapter 10

Chapter 10[edit]

After walking straight through the afternoon, our destination at the end of our little parade was a round facility surrounded by a low fence. It's cloudy so I can't see the position of the sun, but it was getting close to evening.

Near the entrance, there is a rock with a short poem chiseled into it with angular and complicated letters.

Shimaron ya, ah, Shimaron ya Shimaron ya~

... Well Bashou has sure come a long way^[1].

If you compared the arena in Van der Veer to a stadium, this place would be a spot for Farm practice. The size is about the same, but there is a huge difference in the time and money spent on the equipment here. Unlike a stadium where all eyes are focused inwards, there aren't any seats or gates. The wide, oval premises are where something bloodthirsty occurs so it's dry and dusty and little clouds of sand are blowing around^[2].

If I kick aside the small, beadlike clumps of dirt sprinkled across the ground, there is bedrock just beneath the surface. I kick at the ground with my heel and give my opinion as a grass-lot athlete.

"This was a bad choice; it's almost completely rock. If you did sliding practice here, you'd chafe all the way up to your stomach."

There are bunches of spectators between the gaps in the fence. I wonder if there's going to be a really interesting event. What do we do if they make us put on a fighting exhibition? Some bad memories replay in my mind.

When all the prisoners are forced out onto the grounds, I hear commotion from the people in the gaps of the fences. It appears the spectators aren't here for entertainment or healing, but intend to observe the spectacle about to unfold before their eyes with bated breath.

That means what's waiting for us is definitely nothing good.

There were men dressed in priestly garbs close to the walls at regular intervals. I have no idea what they looked like because they have their hoods pulled down over their eyes. I couldn't figure out just what they were there for even though I'm a catcher whose eyesight can analyze the infield and outfield at the same time. They're standing there without swords, spears, or arrows. Is there a meaning to that?

"... You think maybe they're baseball mascots? Like Maron and Roman?"

"If each one of them has a different role, it's one hell of a mascot family."

Flynn has wrapped her arms around her body and is shivering from the cold. Her cheeks that she finally got a little tan are now paled and she looks ill. Noticing that I was peering at her, she gave a forced smile.

"I'm fine."

"No, it's alright. Even I've had the shakes for a while and my head is unbearably heavy."

Actually, a strange sound has been reverberating in my head ever since I caught sight of this place. It's completely different from a ringing in the ears or even that woman's voice. It's a noise like a few thousand bees buzzing around inside my brain. My head is ridiculously heavy and sluggish and the unease in my heart won't calm.

"I definitely caught a cold. I really want to get out of here as soon as possible and take a nice warm bath."

"Yeah," Flynn answered.

Even though it's cold and the prisoners are in thin clothes, if they walk fast enough they can heat themselves up. On the other hand, we're in wet leather coats. The more we're buffeted with the wind, the colder and heavier the coats become and our body heat is just whisked away. Not being able to just watch us suffer, Josak took all of our coats off along the way, but our clothes were stained green from that water all the way down to our underwear so it didn't do much. It was especially severe in Flynn's case. Cold is the greatest enemy of girls. Even though we're in the middle of over a hundred people, it's still hard to dodge the wind.

"Have I told you?"

We stepped closer to each other in order to share even a little bit of warmth. T-Zou squeezed in between us and even though she isn't dry yet, she's warm.

"About the large bath in my castle? It's really awesome. It's a private bath, you know? Or maybe it's a pool. It's really huge. You should come use it sometime. There are a lot of pretty people there so maybe the water is like, 'pretty people water' or something. It's about as long as from here to that old guy over there. That one who started mumbling something to himself."

The bees in my head abruptly step up their activity. I stagger a bit.

"What's wrong, Captain? Hey, wha-"

"Shibuya!"

"No, I'm fine. I've just got a headache and my ears are ringing. This year's cold is the worst. It's not even the flu."

Josak silently lends me his shoulder. This part of him is very similar to Lord Weller.

The angry shouts of the prisoners suddenly get louder. Conversely, the spectators get quieter. The simple wooden doors open and an extravagant carriage with a yellow and light-blue coat of arms enters. Five or six soldiers enter right after it and the man on the horse at the end of the line is someone I recognize.

He's got the Shimaron soldier's official beard and hairstyle. He has gaunt cheeks and, for lack of a better word, narrow eyes. Because of that, the overall impression you get from him is that he's a shrewd, lethal weapon rather than a strong and fearless man. The man who looks like he'd even smell cold if you got close enough to him gets off of his horse with precise and efficient movements and turns toward us. The nickname I've given him is Cropped Ponytail. Abbreviated cutely: Cropped Pony.

Nigel Wise Maxine. He's the pet dog of the magazine centerfold Lord Saralegi, the king of Small Shimaron (According to Flynn Gilbit).

"... Maxine..."

There's no hiding the low tremble in Flynn's voice. I see. So it's just like Adalbert said. He won't die from falling down a few floors. With a wave of his mantle, he gives a command with his hand to his saluting subordinates.

"At ease."

Even though he's only around thirty, his voice is already rough and he's intentionally speaking in a way that will intimidate those around him.

"Now, everyone, I have some good news to begin with."

The buzzing in my ears gets even worse.

"As you all know, these people are all those who fought against us, Small Shimaron, in the last war. If they are still soldiers at heart, then they are living in daily anguish at the cruel fate of being reduced to mere captives."

No thanks to you. With the noise and my headache, I'm getting really pissed off. I look around to see how everyone else is faring, but no one seems to be troubled by this at all. Is it only me?

"However, even though they've spent their days engaging in manual labor, I'm sure they've heard that not just Small Shimaron, but all of the areas that regard the Shimaron countries their suzerain are uniting for a holy war against the demons. As you have been shouldering a part of this endeavor, this is very good news for you."

Josak's awesome biceps move and support my shoulders. After hearing the speaker's words, my knees started to give way.

"After many years of exploration, His Majesty Saralegi of Small Shimaron has finally gotten hold of what we've been searching for. This is a blessing from God! We humans shall wield this great power and vigilantly rule over the continent, no, the world and break through these dark ages! This is the weapon that will defeat the evil demons! This is a holy power that has been bestowed upon us by God! Our hegemony has been promised and we can prevent this world from becoming steeped in evil."

Demons are evil!? These guys are trying to take over the world!? Anger wells in the bottom of my stomach at these groundless statements. But if I lose my temper here, it's guaranteed that I'll cause harm not only to myself, but to

everyone here. In order to keep my cool, I endure my headache and the buzzing in my ears and start to count sheep in my head. One sheep, two sheep... the sheep are dead silent and are going along with this ridiculous speech. Even though we've all been unfairly arrested, as soon as he claimed that demons were evil, even the prisoners started listening with rapt attention.

Why does everyone believe that!? Have any of you been to The Great Demon Kingdom? Have you ever spoken with a demon child? Have any of you spoken with me, the king of the demons, about the fate of this world!?

"That's unfortunate," Muraken mutters with a frown to no one in particular. "It's really unfortunate. But it's inevitable."

"Murata?"

"... This is reality, Shibuya. Peace and equality is difficult."

"What are you saying, all of a sudden..?"

A gentle yet resigned expression appeared on my friend's face.

"They'll be betrayed again and again. From this point on, many times over. Each time, they'll shed blood and they'll be hurt. The one who'll be shedding blood won't be the king. The citizens will suffer hundreds, thousands of times worse. Rather than God or luck, stopping that from happening depends on the abilities of the rulers of the countries."

He's smart so he probably knows a bit about international problems and social climates. Even if we were talking about problems on Earth, I'd only be able to give meaningless, absentminded responses. But if Ken Murata, who shouldn't know anything, can look at the spectators listening to Maxine's fervent speech and start asking questions about this world... then I need to open my mind. Like he saw right through my thoughts, he asked me a question.

"Shibuya, you'll probably be hurt over and over again. It'll be so painful you'll want to die. If you don't act cautiously and daringly, you might actually lose your life. You might lose a lot of what you hold dear and become wracked with regret. Knowing that, will you do it? Can you keep going on like this without stopping?"

"... Yeah."

At some point he must have taken his contacts out because when I turn to face him, both of his eyes are black. I had the strange feeling that I had just met a friend from a really long time ago in a foreign land.

The answer to that question was obvious. Murata was also partially aware of that.

“... Yeah, I’ll do it. It’ll probably be hard, though.”

I’ll probably lose my dear things and bleed and cry.

“Like I thought.”

Murata looks down and lightly kicks the dry ground before giving a short laugh and lifting his head.

“I thought this would happen.”

“Since when!? Since when did you think this would happen? And more importantly, Murata, what are you saying all of a sudden? You actually gave me a serious response.”

Ignoring my confused mutterings, Murata continues his calm speech.

“We went on a journey together in the past, right? Wandering about in a dry land. We were being led around by someone just like now. You probably don’t remember, though. It was a cloudy evening, just like this. The guardian that brought you leaned against a rock next to a cactus and searched for the sun hiding behind the clouds. The sun wouldn’t shine down forever so he lifted you above his head and held you out to the western sky and said this:

May you become the sun.

“... My guardian heard that and was overjoyed. He held me up in the opposite direction and said, ‘May you become the moon.’ Seriously, he’s really into anime and always causing trouble so that was probably some old Gundam-”

“Wait wait wait wait, hold up, you... When the hell was that!? It’s rude to ask someone’s age, but Murata, how old are you?”

He gives me an answer for the first time.

“What are you talking about? Ken Murata is sixteen.”

"I'm really concerned about how you said that..."



Maxine conspicuously raises his voice and the bees in my head increase by ten thousand. Are they reacting to Cropped Pony's voice? Or is there some other reason?

"Probably, yeah probably. I think those guys standing there like monks are sending out some sort of radio waves," said Murata.

"R-radio waves?"

"Thought waves then. Kind of like telepathy. According to Professor Ueda's 'Come at me, Paranormal Phenomenon,' it's a sort of hypnotism using low voices. If it was just hypnotism, then I'd 'come at them,' but magic and the occult are an entirely different matter, actually."

It's a Gettysburg Address via Nigel Wise Maxine. A government of Shimaron by Shimaron and for Shimaron. And power^[3]. "And on this wonderful day that the object that will promise us happiness and eternal hegemony, The End of the Land, has become our kingdom's great fortune, our benevolent King Saralegi of Small Shimaron has granted you all amnesty! You will no longer be prisoners! You'll be able to bring honor and dignity back to your souls after suffering defeat and humiliation as soldiers."

"Is he trying to be Gihren Zabi or something?" Murata asks^[4].

I have no idea who you're talking about. How does he relate to Abraham Lincoln?

After hearing 'amnesty,' the prisoners liven up, but the spectators simply sigh sadly.

"But for proud soldiers, I don't believe that it should be so easy to lift your spirits. Luckily, there is a duty you robust, muscular and brave men can perform that will redeem you. We want you to display your strength in there to your heart's content."

Flynn brought a hand to her mouth. Her gaze is drawn to the carriage. A cylindrical object that looks like the case to a musical instrument and an object like a small wooden casket are cautiously removed from it. All eight sides and twelve edges are bordered with rusted metal and the box has deteriorated from moisture damage. You can't even make out any of the engravings.

"... Why does... Small Shimaron have a box..?"

"What? Flynn, is that The End of the Wind that you were talking about!?"

"No," Murata says loathsomely in a severe voice that I'd never heard from him before. "That's The End of the Land. It's not The End of the Wind. There are four things in this world that must never be touched... two of those have... they've already fallen into human hands..?"

"Huh? But I heard that the bigger one got their hands on Panty-ra's Box, not the smaller Shimaron. Why is there another one here? Are they really that easy to get a hold of?"[\[5\]](#)

"It's not easy."

Flynn had a look on her face that looked like she was going to start chewing on her thumb's fingernail.

"Numerous countries have been competing and searching for them for decades. They weren't quickly found. But for them to fall into people's possession one after another... I thought only Big Shimaron had a box and key."

Her words were quickly swept away by Maxine.

"Fortunately, we have obtained the key to open the box. Now we need to make it known just how tremendous the power it has is and throw the feral demons into the very bottom of despair. Gentlemen, we wish for you to prove that no matter what sort of brave hero fights back they are no match for this power. Lord Saralegi will be pleased!"

"Are you telling us to be subjects in an experiment!? Us, the soldiers our fathers raised!?"

With shouts bordering on shrieks, the prisoners are suddenly thrown into unease.

There's no way that anyone besides Anissina would be able to say something so cruel. However, this human from Small Shimaron, Maxine, will probably flip any switch he needs. Even if he knows it to be cruel. Without feeling bad, worrying, or even smiling, he'll do it with his light brown eyes emotionless.

Nigel Wise Maxine continued speaking without changing his expression at all with his confused sacrifices before him.

"Give your lives for Small Shimaron."

"Wait!"

I'd drank the herb tea my mother recommended to cure my short temper. I patiently listened to a CD and went to sleep. I've even tried counting to ten before exploding. However, in practice and with an outrageous scene before me, I could only wait three seconds. The bees made a bad decision to live in my head. I shake off Josak's hand and step out into the front row of the group.

"That's enough, Mr. Maxine! You think you can just go on and on about your own country if people shut up and listen!? If that really really is the horrible 'box' then shouldn't you know that you should never touch it!?"

The man tilts his head slightly and looks at me like I'm a weird animal.

"I was thinking I'd seen you before... It was at the Gilbit Estate. My thanks for how you treated me. My injuries haven't quite healed yet."

Ah, well I'm sorry for that. But that's off topic.

"Oh, is that Gilbit's wife next to you? No, there's no way."

Throwing a sidelong glance at Flynn who flinches and is at a loss for words, Cropped Pony keeps on talking. He wasn't acting especially triumphant, but naturally, he wasn't really angry either. That's what's really irritating about him.

"Flynn Gilbit was a determined lady who took the place of her husband in an unwomanly way. Even though it was hidden under a mask, her real face was even more noble and beautiful. There's no way that the filthy girl in front of me is the Lady of Caloria."

"... It doesn't matter who I am."

Contrary to Maxine's words, I feel like she's at her most ladylike right now. Even with wet and disorderly platinum blond hair and modest work clothes made for men. Even with her entire body soaked with that green river water. I like Flynn Gilbit now much more than when she was wearing that mask and pretending to be her husband.

"I don't care how you see me! But Maxine, the war hasn't even started yet. Don't open the box on a whim. And using fellow humans to test it on? There's no way you'll be forgiven for something so horrible."

"What's that got to do with a little girl? No, even if you were the indomitable Lady of Caloria, you have no authority to dictate the methods of Small Shimaron. In any case, Gilbit is a place that has disregarded its suzerain state and engaged in criminal activity with Big Shimaron."

"I won't make excuses for that. I believed that was for the best, after all. But if you also know of the dangers of the boxes, then you should not carelessly test it in a place with innocent bystanders!"

"Then as per the advice of the village girl, we will have the spectators removed. But, you have no right to interfere with these prisoners carrying out their duty. They are prisoners of our country and have forfeited their rights of their own volition by committing crimes."

"They're your country's people, aren't they!?"

I'm not sexist but I can't just let a girl do all the fighting.

"You know, I just can't understand anything when it comes to your country's brutality and it pisses me off, Maxine! Even if they were soldiers from an enemy country you're going to treat them like this after the war is over!? There's something wrong with the way you people think. Are you just going to completely ignore human rights and humane treatment!? We can't take part in this experiment! Let us go home already!"

"Go home?"

Cropped Pony's dark beard and thin lips twisted slightly. He smiled.

"Black eyes and black hair, I don't know why a rare Twin Black demon like yourself is here, but... Then, nameless demon, use that magic from before and try to stop me. If you put on a display of that terrible magic, it would be easy to rip off one of my arms."

Rip off an arm. A left arm severed and falling to the floor, Lord Weller's words of apology that I shouldn't have been able to hear. The events of that day are brought back like they happened yesterday and all the blood flowing in my body speeds up. My heartbeat is about to double.

Nigel Wise Maxine holds the cylinder that looks like a music case and has a soldier pull out the contents. The young soldier holds the near half-burned and

black object high.

"... Just like this."

And I saw that.

1. ↑ Matsuo Bashou was a famous poet in the Edo period. Yuuri is being a sarcastic little punk here :)
2. ↑ This is actually baseball related... I had to research this because I had no idea what it was, but the Farm is apparently what Japan's Minor League is called. The More You Know~☆
3. ↑ For the non-Americans (and quite possibly for many of the Americans as well ^-^;;), The Gettysburg Address is a speech that Abraham Lincoln gave during the Civil War where he proclaimed that the war was not only just a struggle between the Union and the Confederacy, but also a war for human equality. The part of the speech (kinda) referenced here is "...that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."
4. ↑ Gihren Zabi is a character from Gundam. He was one of the heads of the Principality of Zeon and he was the one who gave the speech that (possibly) created the 'Sieg Zeon!' salute. Anyway, he's compared to Adolf Hitler a lot, even in the show.
5. ↑ Panty-ra's Box is a reference (kind of) to a joke in novel 5. I mentioned it in my post about stuff that got left out of the German version. Basically, when Conrad and Günter were telling Yuuri about The End of the Wind, Yuuri tried to compare it to Pandora's Box and apparently forgot what it was really called. ^-^

Chapter 11

Chapter 11[edit]

“Shibuya, no!”

“Your Majesty?”

An unbearable scream passes my throat.

I press my hands to my ears and fall down with my eyes wide open. I writhe around in the dirt and the dust sticks to my damp clothes. My head is splitting in two, my eardrums are bursting and my eyes are burning! I open my mouth as far as it can go to get some oxygen, but I can’t breathe because of the screams being forced out of me.

“What’s wrong!? Captain, what’s wrong!?”

I throw Flynn off as she tries to grab hold of me. Even after Josak grabs my arms from behind, I still kick around in the air with my legs. Let go it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts so much it feels like my head is going to explode!

“Shibuya, calm down, calm down. You’re in pain because you’re trying to use magic. You have to control yourself. You can do it, right? Slowly calm your anger; put away your sword of justice. See? You can breathe normally. You can hear properly and you aren’t burned anywhere.”

Murata’s fingers that likely spend most of their time typing on a keyboard touch my feverish cheek. Tears are coming to my eyes from the pain and my difficulty breathing.

“You can’t use magic here. There isn’t anything that obeys the demons here under normal circumstances, but now those monks lined up over there are casting a shield over this place.”

“... ugh.”

“Kind of like the baseball domes you like... why are you laughing and crying at the same time?”

“... You... said... sword of justice...”

“Well don’t you like dispensing justice, Shibuya?”

“Murata, you... who are you really?”

“What are you talking about? We were in the same class in second and third year in middle school weren’t we?”

I can finally breathe normally. I doubt I can stand by myself, but I’ve got enough strength to wipe away my drool. My head still hurts like it’s split open.

“... Shit, it hurts... hey, that thing Cropped Pony is holding...”

“Hm?” Murata lifted his gaze.

I glare at the blurry image of Maxine. However, he’s not going to deal with a trivial thing who was writhing around on the ground from using a tiny bit of magic.

“... That’s Conrad’s arm.”

The blood was still rushing up to my brain and I lifted my chin and gulped for air like a dying koi fish. Breathe. You need to breathe.

“What did you say!? What’s going on back home!? What do you mean that’s my commander’s arm!? You sure you’re not mistaken...”

Josak peers at me from behind. I want to give him a proper answer, but I don’t have the ability.

“I’m not mistaken... It’s Conrad’s arm. There’s no way I’d ever mistake it for someone else’s. That arm has protected me so many times. That arm has...”

“Wait, by Conrad do you mean Lord Conrart Weller? That’s Dunheely Weller’s son right? Why is that person’s arm here!? That key should have been put under Big Shimaron’s control by their archers with the Wincott poison,” Flynn asks.

“The one who got shot was Günter, not Conrad... Then out of the three of us, that arrow was meant for Conrad! But...”

“No... There’s no point if his arm was cut off... I can’t believe it...” Flynn murmurs to herself.

While we were talking, Maxine and the young Shimaron soldier lifted the lid to

the rotted wooden box. I don't know what it looks like inside, but nothing came leaking out.

"Stop! That's not the key to that box!" Flynn yelled.

"What did you say?"

"A certain man's left arm' is the key to The End of the Wind! I've heard that the key to The End of the Land is the left eyeball of a certain bloodline. If you open the box with a different key, no one will be able to stop its rampage!"

"Do you think Lord Saralegi didn't test it? That left eye was already tested in Svelera. However, all that happened was that the man's face was burned and nothing changed. In other words, the key to this box is not the left eye. Then all we need to do is test out this key before Big Shimaron can."

Murata yells out and starts running.

"Stop! If you carelessly let him loose it can't be undone! It won't end with just these humans here dying, the entire country – the entire continent will be ravaged by that box! If the continent falls into chaos, the entire world will be affected! That's not something that humans can control! Only those who have the key in their bodies can seal The Originator again!"

"Hmph, are you the aide of that demon with his magic sealed? I only follow Lord Saralegi's orders. No one knows what will happen... In any case..." The color of the clothes, the shape of the elbow, it was definitely Conrad's arm. I remember that arm along with a baseball glove. I remember how that arm bent as it caught a ball in front of his chest.

Maxine lays the 'key' in the 'box' and carefully positions the soldier. Since Conrad's burned arm is still inside he hasn't strictly 'opened' the box with the key but perhaps inserted it somewhere inside?

"... If the entire world is thrown into chaos, there would be nothing more joyous."

At the sound of a metallic clank like a lock falling, Flynn collapsed to her knees.

"That key... is wrong..."

"There's no time to sit around!"

Murata grabs her arm and yells out to Josak and me.

"Hurry! We need to get somewhere where the ground is even a little bit solider! It might be too late though."

T-Zou turns her face to the south and the hair on her nose stands on end. I felt faint tremors from far away and just like that, they're right below my feet. I heard the scream from an older woman amongst the spectators outside the fences.

That was the beginning of the nightmare.

The screams multiplied immediately and everyone ran about in random directions trying to escape.

Running directly from the south to the north, fissures and projections appeared in the ground randomly. The barrier that the exorcists erected is useless. The fissures immediately appeared inside the fences. It took all we had to run around and avoid falling into the fissures with the level 5 tremors under our feet.

"Murata! Flynn!"

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I didn't even have time to figure out what was going on.

I desperately called after the other two as Josak helped me along. The sheep had more jumping power than humans and she had already glued herself to my side. For every large fissure that opens up, several people are sucked into the cracks. It doesn't matter whether they're soldiers or prisoners. The same thing goes for the spectators.

"Murata!" I grab the collar of my friend who jumped over and shook him even harder than the tremors. "I don't have time to ask who you really are, but we need to stop this earthquake! We have to save as many as we can! You know what needs to be done, don't you!? You know how to stop this, right!?"

"... Unfortunately, even I don't know."

No way.

"If it was just an earthquake caused by an exorcist it would stop if you killed

him, but this is the punishment for opening the box. The Originator of the Land that was sealed in The End of the Land is running around at will.”

“But there must be a way.”

“If the proper person who had the proper key opened the box in the proper manner... we might have been able to control the contents of the box... it’s really only a ‘might have’ though.”

“So then we just watch this happen!?”

Murata just says my name with a troubled voice.

“Do we just sit on our hands until everyone is gone!?”

“There’s nothing we can do. We have to let it run its course. If we’re lucky, it’ll get bored of this place and move on. If we’re lucky, it’ll get bored of rampaging and calm down like a dormant volcano. But this destruction will probably go on for near-forever. If that happens, this continent is lost.”

Small cracks formed under our feet. We withdraw to a less damaged area. Everyone is trying to escape to the safe area so the space quickly fills up. “... There must be something we can do. We don’t have to stop it completely; we just need to keep the casualties to a minimum...”

On my left, Flynn sucks in a breath and runs out into the dangerous area. There are four or five children left behind in a shaky spot that looks like it will crumble any second. I try and follow after her, but Josak grabs my shoulder.

“Not you, Your Majesty.”

“Why?! Are you going to go on about how I’m the king again!? Do you think that Flynn can save them by herself!? No one else is going to help her!”

“I’m going to help her so Your Majesty and Your Highness should stay where it’s safe! If not, those three brothers will kill me.” Murata and I are left behind with the others as he jumps over several fissures with his long legs and moves towards her and the children. He carries one at each side and turns his back on the last one. Flynn takes the hands of the two older children and tries to ease them forward while calming their tears.

At that moment, a huge tremor came.

No one was able to remain standing and we all crouched on the ground.

“Watch out!”

Josak withstood the tremor more or less, but Flynn fell while holding onto the two children. A fissure was running along the ground behind her. Trying to get to her, I leap twice over small fissures. As I’m about to put my all into one more leap, I meet her gaze as she remains unable to stand.

Stop.

What do you mean, stop?

Flynn turns to me once again and wordlessly says not to come. Her light green eyes narrow and she slightly shakes her head. Behind her, an earthen wave rises and the dry ground bursts.

“Flynn!”

I’m assaulted by the pain from before. I’m brought to my hands and knees and I hold on to the sharp pain threatening to make me lose consciousness. I can’t just let this pain go away. If I let it go I can’t save her.

“Shibuya, strong magic in human lands is impossible and there are even a bunch of exorcists around.”

“Leave me alone!” I complain childishly without meaning to. The other evacuees step away from me, startled. Murata is lightly rubbing my back. I really feel like I’m going to throw up.

“It’s too dangerous. People have died trying to do that. I can’t allow you to-”

“What do you mean ‘allow me?’”

His hand stops moving right on the center of my back.

“What do you mean, ‘allow me?’ I don’t even know who you are and you’re talking about giving me permission to do things!? If I can’t use it when I want to... If I can’t use it in times like these, there’s no point in having this power!”

“... What are you going to do?”

“I can’t say for sure, but I’ll definitely make it better than it is now.”

I heard a long, resigned sigh. This wasn’t like his cheerful self. But, his voice

quickly gains some resolve and he grabs my shoulders.

"You're not going to regret whatever happens to you?"

"No."

"... Okay. Then do what you want. I'll watch over whatever you do."

Flynn and the children are only half above ground now and are only a tiny tremor away from disappearing beneath the earth. There are several other people also about to fall. Several hundred are falling to the very bottom^[1].

There's another tremor like the first one coming from the south.

I have to hurry. As it is now, many of the people left behind on the rocks and hanging from the edges of the fissures will all fall straight into hell with this tremor.

My emotions are so worked up that I wouldn't mind falling into that trance state, but the voice that's been guiding me isn't saying a single word to me today. Keeping myself aware of Murata's hands on my shoulders, I calmly question myself.

Think. Who do I want to save me?

Or, who do I want to save?

It's not like I want to borrow someone's power. I should be able to control it myself.

The overwhelming, sharp pain makes me think I'm really going to throw up this time, but there's nothing in my stomach.

Deep within my ears, I hear the sound of what I called forth. It's coming from below the surface with great speed. The water that smashes rock and splits the earth and fills every little gap has come closer.

Get over your fear and resignation.

Believe and make an effort.

Suddenly, my consciousness fades and my body sinks deep, deep down as if I'm falling asleep.

The clear blue water wells up at an unbelievable speed and catches the people about to fall into the fissures.

Flynn and the children fell into the water, but they somehow washed up on the ground on the other side. It's wider and safer than the other surfaces and if they hop over two or three cracks, they can make it to the road leading into town.

Many humans fall into the flow and end up slowly drifting in the new river. The one saving grace was that the flow was gentle. If they have enough strength to stay afloat, they'll eventually get to a shore somewhere.

However, the next large tremor that comes doesn't let the water in that's been acting as a cushion and creates another huge crevasse.

Three seconds earlier it was only a centimeter wide crack, but in the next moment the two sides push together and rise up and turn into a sort of ravine with gigantic cliffs.

My utterly exhausted and heavy body suddenly lightens for a brief moment.

Before the thought of 'I'm falling!?' even enters my mind, my arms instinctively reach out to grab hold of the edge of the cliff. My friend who was rubbing my back next to me isn't there anymore.

"Murata!?"

The aftershocks show no sign of dying down and the irregular and intense tremors are jeopardizing the humans who are trying to jump over fissures. They can swim across the fissures that are filled with water, but they have to either jump over or walk along the newly formed ones. The people hanging off of ledges are struggling to climb up, but the tremors are preventing them from doing so as if on purpose.

"Murata! Where are you!? Damn it! My right hand is tingling... Don't tell me you fell. Give me a break, please... Mura-"

"Your Majesty! Young Master!" Josak's voice comes from the other side of the cliff. With the fingers on both of my hands tingly and numb, I turn my head to

see Josak pulling up Murata from the edge of the cliff on the fairly distant other side. That's a relief. At least he avoided crashing down into the abyss.

In any case, this is one hell of a crevasse that formed here. It's got to be at least 20 meters wide.

"Your Majesty! I'm gonna get over there as soon as possible so hold on until then."

Before I could ask how, an aftershock makes my fingers go even number. Josak let out a shout.

"It's okay. I'm alright. Hey, I have a favor to ask you."

"What's that?"

His orange hair is disheveled and he's struggling to cross over to my side. It's impossible. It's too far even with a running jump and there's no footholds in between to cross with multiple jumps.

"I'll take care of myself somehow so take Murata somewhere safe. Take Murata and Flynn back to The Great Demon Kingdom and treat them like guests until I come back."

Murata is an amateur who knows nothing about this world and still thinks that this is on Earth and the only one who can protect him is me... is how it was supposed to be. The circumstances have changed a bit, but as the one who brought him here on a Star Tours it's my responsibility to get him home unharmed.

"I can't leave Your Majesty behind!"

"Please, Josak. I'm begging you! There's no one else I can ask."

"Well of course His Highness is important too! But still!"

I don't even have enough strength left to talk much less ask what's important about him. With the next small tremor, I'll definitely fall. I have no feeling left in my fingers at all and after losing focus for a split second, my left hand slips off. My one arm holding on becomes three fingers, two fingers, and lastly my middle finger...

My awareness comes back with a shock like my shoulder is being dislocated.

Pale fingers and a sleeve in a familiar color were solidly grasping my right wrist.

"I finally caught you."

"... Wolf... why are you here..?"

Lord Wolfram von Bielefeldt gives a bitter laugh as his beautiful face twists into a grimace. For a moment, I see traces of his eldest brother and despite the state of emergency I'm in, I feel a sense of admiration.

"You're a flirt and a cheat so I secretly stuck a transmitter on you so I can chase after you anywhere in the world. Hey, it's no good with just one hand. Grab on with both of them."

"But with your weight... you won't be able to pull me up. If things go wrong, you might even-!"

"If that happens..."

Wolfram grabs a hold of my sweaty wrist with both hands as it starts to slip and gives me a stern and manly smile.

"I'll fall with you."

Something must have happened while I was away because this is the first time I've seen such an expression on his face.

"Trust me."

Overpowered by his confidence, I swing my dangling left arm overhead. The Pretty Boy, who used to be a delicate and high-strung little yippy puppy, pulled me up with all his strength a little overenthusiastically and he ended up falling on his back and pulling me down with him. When I panicked and tried to get off of him, a part of my sleeve or something caught against his cheek and left a small scrape.

"Wolf, you're bleeding... I'm sorry."

"You don't have to apologize. It's to be expected," he says rapidly and then looks around impatiently. "It would have been nice if Gisela had come to this side. Unfortunately we've been separated. Anyway Yuuri! What were you doing and where!? It's inexcusable to leave me, your fiancé, behind and go off on some journey without thinking about anyone else! And on top of that, you couldn't

even pull yourself up as you're about to fall off a cliff... This weakness is unfit for the Demon King. This is why I call you a wimp... Yuuri?"

"Didn't I endure it until now?"

"What's wrong?"

Even when night came, when I was alone, when I met Josak, didn't I endure it until now? Then why can't I bear it anymore? It's only been a few dozen seconds since we met again.

"Wolf... Conrad is..."

"I know."

I must look really miserable. He's not even getting mad that I'm talking about the brother he doesn't like and he's put an arm around my shoulders.

"It's okay if you cry. I was a little distraught as well."

"He's not dead. He's definitely not dead, but..."

But he's not here or anywhere. Lord Weller isn't coming back.

"You can cry as much as you want. Gurrier, Gisela and I are all here. You can cry as much as you want any time now."

"... Damn it!"

I force myself to pull away and show him my injury from getting caught on a jagged rock.

"Look at this, you can see the flesh... It's bleeding so much... And then this is where you grabbed me and pulled me up. It's all swollen and hot. I might have sprained my wrist. Worst case, it might even be broken. What do I do? Damn... it hurts... it really hurts. It's so ridiculously painful there are tears in my eyes... How stupid am I?"

"You're not stupid. The foolish one is Conrart."

Why are you only saying things like that to me? Things that just make me hurt even more.

Things that just make me want to cry out and sob.

"But even if you know it's foolish, there are times you have to do it anyway. Even you're like that, right? You've always done things like that."

"Well sorry for being a fool."

A man that looked like a companion of Wolfram's comes running forward while stumbling. I recognize that closely shaven head. It's Günter's subordinate Dacascos.

"Your Majesty! Ah what a relief that Your Excellency is safe too!"

"How far is the damage?"

When Wolfram asked in my place, Dacascos wiped the sweat off of his forehead with his sleeve as he stood there out of breath.

"... It's really horrible. They're saying that there are fissures cutting across the continent... and that the epicenter was near the southern tip of Caloria so it seems that the port town of Gilbit is completely destroyed."

"Caloria!? The port town of Gilbit!?"

Dacascos nodded with pity.

"According to the Flying Skeleton Tribe, chaos is inevitable with their leader absent. I don't know the exact reason, but it seems like it's going to be very severe."

The port town of Gilbit in the autonomous territory of Caloria is where the elderly haul cargo during the day and at night they wait for the return of their children and grandchildren who were stolen for the military. The people of Caloria truly despise war so they bear discontent and anxiety in their heart regarding their suzerain state and are hoping that the feudal lord Norman Gilbit will make the proper decisions. They believe that he will guide them to their hopes.

However they don't know that Norman has died and the successor Flynn has been emotionally destroyed and won't cry out for the people who have been hurt.

I will strength into my knees and stand next to Wolfram.

"... If they have a mask, can anyone become king...?"

"No. The only ones who can be a king are those who have the talent for it."

Even though he doesn't know what's going on, Wolfram is searching for the words I want to hear.

"That's something that you possess."

I'm the only one left who can wear the mask of Norman Gilbit.

1. [↑](#) Linguistic note! The word for 'the very bottom' used here ('naraku') can also mean hell. It gives the impression that these people aren't just falling, but they're very definitely dying as well.